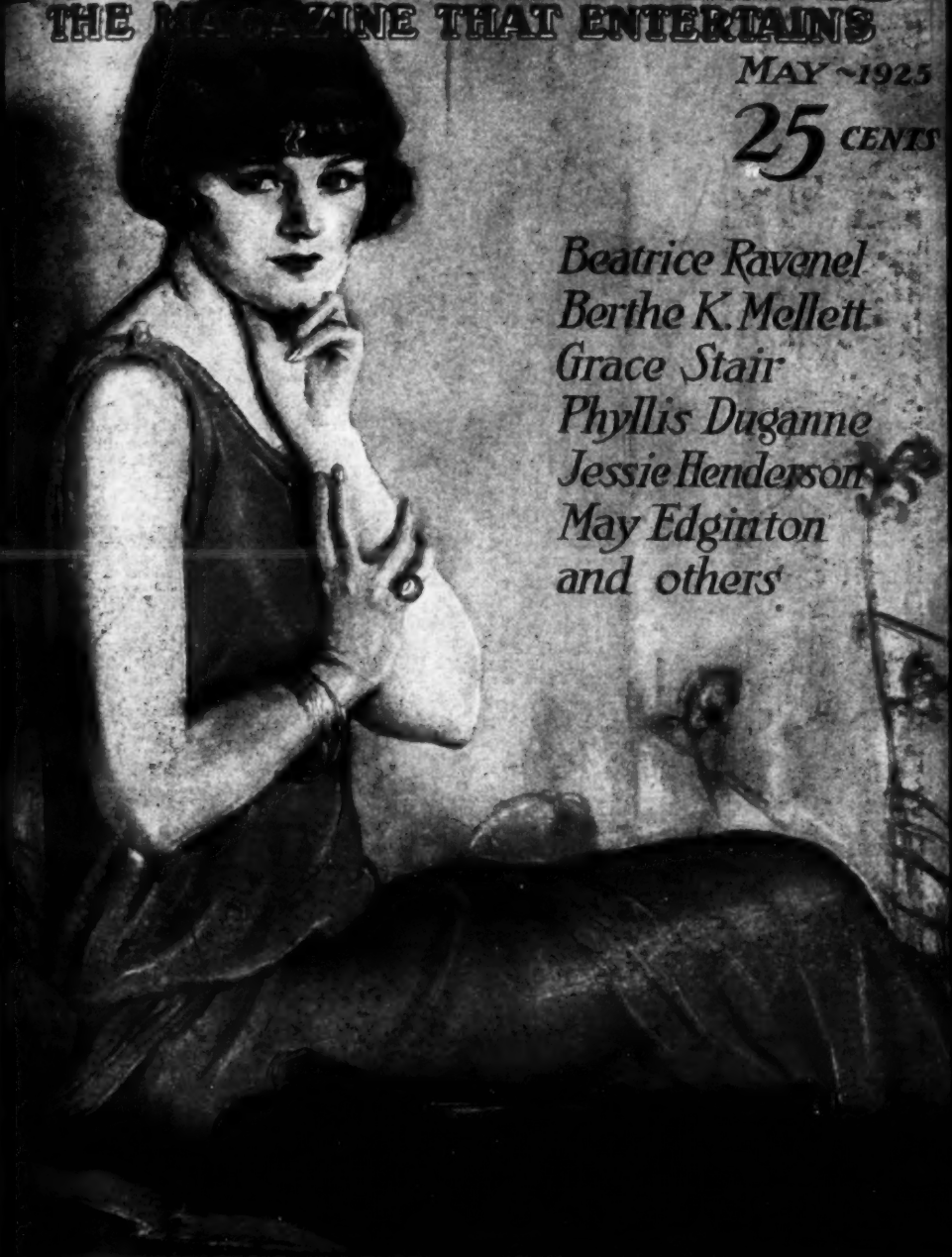


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MAY ~ 1925

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May
1925

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THE MAGAZINE THAT ENTERTAINS

Vol. LV
No. 3

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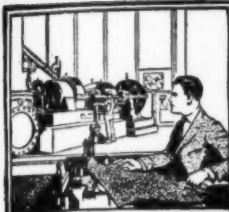
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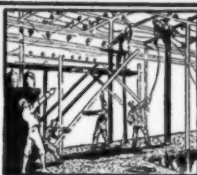
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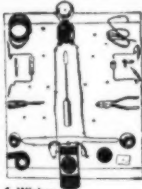
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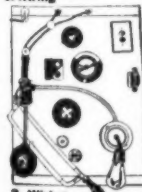


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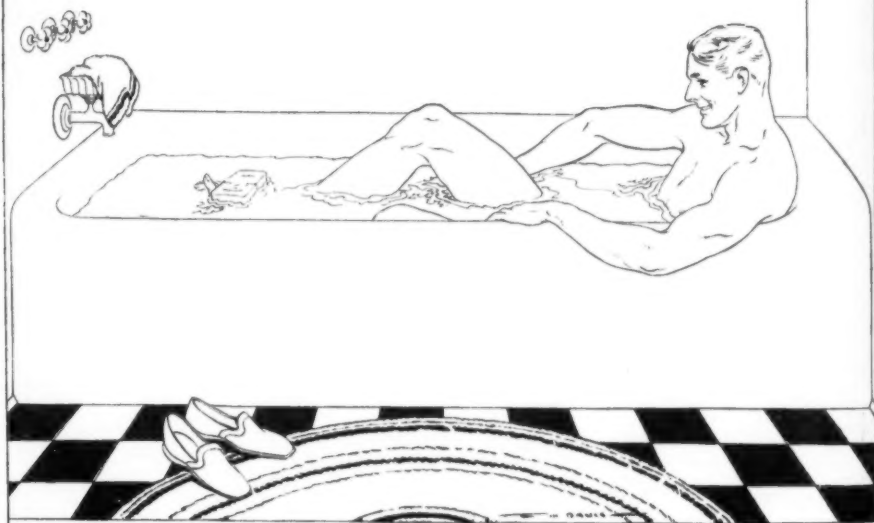
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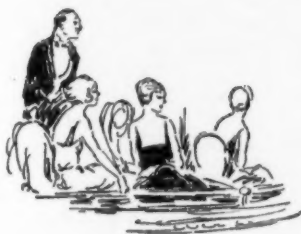
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AINSLEE'S

VOL. LV.

MAY, 1925.

No. 3



The Long, Long Arm

By Warren E. Schutt

Author of "Assarian, Superman,"
"The Little Silver Crucifix," etc.

CHAPTER I.

CREIGHTON was relieved indeed when the first signs of the break-up of the supper party were at hand. He felt that he had acted throughout it like a disgruntled, love-sick schoolboy. Certainly his long silences, his crabbed replies to Slidell, his too emphatically disapproving glances at Penelope, and his almost complete disregard of the strange and fascinating woman who sat at his right, was not such conduct as one had a right to expect from a man of the world, or from a man of his achievement and station in life.

But, then, what would you? On this night of Penelope's great triumph, why couldn't she have been alone with him? She must know that he would be in this intolerable state of keeping in forced leash his great love for her, which demanded and was denied expression until it stifled him. And certainly never more so than on this night, after he had been for three hours held enthralled by new manifestations, through the medium of Oscar Zoltan's play, of Penelope's marvels.

But, of course, it was Brockton's supper. Penelope had explained that to him with more patience than he deserved, considering the force of his ex-

postulations with her. It was Brockton's supper in Brockton's own suite in the theater; and, since Brockton was an astute manager, he made the most of the occasion, in his intolerably crude way. Penelope had to tell Creighton that it was only by her express demand that he was present at all.

For, with the exception of that lovely but mysterious woman who sat at Creighton's right, it was strictly a professional gathering that paid homage to Penelope Hale on this occasion of her greatest success. The five members of her supporting cast, who didn't count to start with, were tactful enough to efface themselves, in addition to not counting. There was Brockton himself—a clever, crude, forceful man who had come from out of the West somewhere with a shoe string, and now owned four of the most successful plays on Broadway. There was the insufferable sycophant that was Slidell, Brockton's greatest press agent, so voracious for information of all and sundry natures that he would have had from Creighton complete details of Creighton's rumored juggling with the C. & S. C. stocks if Creighton hadn't caught himself up in time. Nosy little bounder that Slidell was!

Then there were the two Hungarians

—Oscar Zoltan, who had written the play that now bade fair to make Penelope's name the greatest on Broadway, a fat poseur of slight mustache and monocle, whose sagacious humanity and caustic wit held Penelope far too much; and this woman who sat beside Creighton, who called herself Anna Sofia Ronai, whom Zoltan had brought to the supper as the woman who had inspired the play. What a cad the Hungarian playwright was, to bring to Penelope's supper the woman who had inspired him with Penelope's play, and to flaunt her before Penelope's eyes in this fashion!

Yet Creighton suddenly found the strange woman attractive. Why, he scarcely knew. Perhaps because the food had disappeared, the five members of the cast growing dumber and sleepier, Brockton yawning and uneasy, Zoltan, in his Continental fashion, waxing amorous toward Penelope. Yes, perhaps that latter was the reason for Creighton's suddenly coming to life, rather than relief at the signs of the lateness of the hour. Self-defense, perhaps, on account of Zoltan, led him suddenly to take more than formal interest in that unusual, glittering woman who called herself by her strange full name: Anna Sofia Ronai.

Although this was the first time he had met her, Creighton had already heard something of her, both from Penelope, at whose rehearsals she had been present by Zoltan's request, and from gossip in one or another of his clubs.

During that no more than two weeks that she had been in New York, the clubs along the Avenue had come to know her chiefly by that magnificent white borzoi she had continually with her, whether riding in proud state beside her in her Hispano-Suiza, or occasionally walking with her at the end of a silver leash which, with its fineness and its constant tautness, looked dan-

gerously fragile. General comment on dog and mistress conveyed that a better matched pair could not have been imagined.

Penelope confirmed this opinion to Creighton, and went further with it.

"They give you the impression of having precisely the same traits," she told him in her somewhat enthusiastic account of Anna Sofia Ronai. "Lithe-ness, delicacy, exquisite grace, proud poise of head—yes, all these are evident. But there is a similarity between them which is not so evident, yet which, to me, is just as certain, even though it is only suggested. They both give you the hint of tremendous reserve of power; a threat of some lightning stroke of passion. I even shudder sometimes when I see the wolfhound's gleaming dagger teeth; they seem to be a hint of some surreptitious weapon that the mistress must possess, something that can strike, and tear mercilessly, and be sheathed again on the instant in a smile."

That, of course, was woman's fancy, Creighton told himself. The facts about Madame Ronai—or Anna Sofia, as she insisted on being called—were more to the point. She was sprung—Zoltan had told this much to Penelope—from a junction of the two great Hungarian families, the Hatvany and the Ferolyi. She had married, for love, a plebeian below her station—in everything but brains and courage—and had thereby forsworn ancestral wealth and position. He had died in the war, in the service of his country. Thenceforth she had walked the earth alone: hence the play that was to make Penelope great—"The Woman Without Peace."

True, Anna Sofia had married again, confessedly for money; had married Carlos Ronai, of agrarian bank fame, of Transcaspian oil fame, a gigantic if rather nebulous figure in European finance before his sudden death two years before. Thereafter she had glit-

tered seasons through in all the worthwhile places in Europe, and at last had come to New York. Why? Because of Oscar Zoltan, one thought instantly, without thinking much more than that. Someway, it seemed only natural and right and real for such a woman as Anna Sofia Ronai to have a lover, of whatever degree of platonism. More credit to her to choose one so clever, so worth while, as Oscar Zoltan undeniably was.

And now, suddenly, so near the end of supper, while—if not because—Oscar Zoltan, exhilarated by Lanson Frères pressed upon him with Brockton's prodigality, was waxing amorous toward Penelope, and Penelope did not repel his attentions with the haughty publicity Creighton would have liked—while or because of that Creighton suddenly began to realize the potential fascination of Anna Sofia Ronai. Perhaps Anna Sofia, too, had noticed Zoltan's just too much of personalities, and had deliberately resorted to guile to wake him up. At any rate, Creighton found himself suddenly impelled to ask her:

"Why should you, apparently the most blissful and gayest of women, inspire such a piece as 'The Woman Without Peace?' Upon my word, it's been tormenting me all evening." A polite lie, that, but Creighton hoped it would pass muster in excuse for his previous silence.

"If I could not inspire it, how, then, could Miss Hale so successfully play it? She, no more than I, suggests a woman without peace of soul."

"A woman must be a wanderer in any case, I think," Creighton said rather gloomily, watching Zoltan take his arm from the back of Penelope's chair, but only to help himself to more champagne.

"Do you really love her so very much?" Anna Sofia asked, so softly, so matter-of-factly that Creighton had to think twice to believe that he had heard aright.

Then his answer was no more than a stare at her.

She smiled at him, more with her deep-blue eyes than with her lips.

"Amazing audacity of mine—that is what you want to say, is it not?" she said.

"Well, yes, if you must know!" But Creighton tempered his speech with a tight-lipped smile.

She lifted her lovely shoulders in a sigh, and herself studied the pair opposite.

"It's not for you to worry about," she said. "I know Zoltan. Either he will disgust her, or he will intrigue her beyond your competition. He has brains, you know—Zoltan has."

It was a speech not designed to dispel Creighton's gloom, and yet he felt a strange exhilaration as a result of it.

"Ah, you are a fighting man, I perceive," was Anna Sofia's next word.

"You put me on my mettle—for the moment," Creighton returned with studied casualness.

"You were in the war?" she asked him.

He nodded briefly. Enticing mannerism, engaging personality the woman had. He looked her over, fortified as he was with wine and rebellion, perhaps a trace too intimately, though she gave no sign of protest.

He guessed her years to be not more than twenty-eight or thirty, and her age to be—Heaven knew what. Abruptly he saw in her the woman without peace, but never in her delicate and lovely features, only in the depths of her eyes. A small-figured, almost fragile woman, who, nevertheless, as Penelope had said, gave one the impression that she possessed unmeasured reserve strength; a woman, somehow, of sharp contradictions, almost of a dual personality, the one lovable and enticing beyond most, the other—well, what? Alluring in its very mystery. What was it she had said last to him?

"Yes, I was in the war," he said almost sharply.

"Unscathed?"

"Advocate general's staff, after we entered the war."

"Oh! And there was something else before?"

Creighton flushed with pleasure that she had forced him to tell of it. What a silly boy he was to-night!

"Yes. Foreign Legion. Gassed. Oh, I'm all right now."

"Oh, and for that, the advocate general's staff." Her voice was suddenly hard, repellent—so much so that Zoltan looked across at her, his wine-clouded eyes seeing clear for that second.

"They tell me," she said after a moment, "that you are a stockbroker."

"Who tells you?"

"I heard you talking of it with——"

"Oh, with Slidell," Creighton said, and his feeling for that loquacious little sot was plain in his tone. "I'm an independent trader. There is a difference," he corrected her.

"Does that mean that you gamble with your own money?"

"My own, or borrowed. Mainly borrowed, I regret to say."

Rather naively she scrutinized him.

"Then you must have the best of judgment about investments."

"More fool luck than judgment, I guess, and more foolhardiness than either."

"One would expect a man like you to say that," she said. "Now I am more than ever convinced."

"Of what, may I ask?"

"That you are exactly the man I want to know. I have occasionally to look out for investments. I asked the local branch of the *Oesterreichische Bank*. The manager suggested two or three firms of brokers, but I—I haven't been to see them yet. I've been afraid, somehow. New York daunts me, I think."

"Who are they? I can tell you pretty well how far to trust them."

"I forget now. Why should I go to them, now that I know you? May I not come to your offices some time soon—to-morrow or next day—to ask you about some things?"

Creighton hesitated. Zoltan had dropped his monocle and was looking at them again as if their silence had attracted him. Penelope, too, followed his gaze with her own eyes. Creighton felt that he flushed.

"Yes," he told Anna Sofia rather loudly. "I shall be glad to see you at any time."

"Soon, I think. Perhaps even to-morrow afternoon. I must go downtown then in any case."

He gave her his address—almost flung it at her, one might have said. For Creighton, in that rebellious mood of his, was angry at Anna Sofia for deftly wheedling him into that which he would prefer next day to avoid. Giving a woman advice in investments, indeed—especially a woman like Anna Sofia Ronai, who had millions on millions, and a way with her that a man pays for! Ass that he was not to have left her alone, not to have kept up the wall which at first he had built between them.

Soon thereafter—very soon thereafter, in fact—Penelope gave the signal for the breaking up of the party. Time, too, for it! Brockton, crude, bald-headed Brockton, was all but snoring. Slidell was talking presidential election with a pretty flapper of the cast who didn't know the names of the candidates. Zoltan was quoting to Penelope that ode of Sappho's: "He seems to me in sooth to be a god, who sits beside thee——" and all the rest of his vinous exhalation, until Penelope arose in the middle of it, and left him saying it softly to himself.

He did get up, but Creighton was first at her side.

"Yes, you shall go home with me," she told Creighton in a whisper.

Later, in her coupé, as they drove up through the Park, she said:

"You have been so like a naughty, naughty boy to-night, with your pouting and your——"

"Dear Penelope, I have not in all these past two years loved you as I loved you to-night. And I had to tell you so, and I couldn't tell you so. It was like some delicious poison, suffocating me."

"I do understand, Vance. And I would have preferred infinitely to be alone with you. But what could I do?"

"Nothing, of course. It's all right, now. But that ass Zoltan——"

"Please don't call him an 'ass.' He is really very clever."

"And interesting, I have no doubt."

Penelope, wise woman that she was, only smiled at his rebellion.

"You are in a reckless mood to-night."

Creighton tried to redeem himself.

"Well, let him be interesting, so long as he be no more than that."

Penelope changed the topic.

"And what," she asked, "do you think of the woman without peace?"

"Madame Ronai?"

"There is no other. Or did you not see it?"

"In her eyes—occasionally."

"Look out for her, Vance."

"Why?"

"Some man has hurt her terribly. She is—oh, I can't express it because it is only a feeling of mine. Knowing the play as I do, and those gleaming white teeth of her borzoi—— Oh, I am silly, I guess. The woman without peace! I wish I knew! Vance, dear, promise me to look out for yourself."

CHAPTER II.

Anna Sofia Ronai was prodigal of her attentions that night. Her eye fell upon little Slidell, and rested there thoughtfully without his knowledge. For he, evidently believing that all the

rest were too busy with departure to notice him, was in the act of draining the champagne which Vance Creighton had left in his glass. Anna Sofia waited until he was done and past the embarrassment of being caught at it, and then approached him casually.

"If you chance to be going our way," she said to him, "we can give you a lift. Zoltan and I are going on to my suite at the Regent."

Slidell was too bemused to see in her offer anything but a sincere desire for his company, and accepted it zestfully. To him it made no difference where he went, so long as he might bask in her reflected glory. Anna Sofia knew that much about the man.

The three of them entered her limousine, Zoltan looking mentally askance at Slidell, Slidell babbling learnedly of dogs while Anna Sofia took charge of the borzoi from the footman who had been waiting inside the car with that magnificent animal. Slidell put out his hand, but withdrew it sharply at the raising of the wolfhound's upper lip.

"If you don't mind," Anna Sofia apologized, "she won't take petting—yet."

That "yet" was an invitation, or so Slidell thought.

"Then here's hoping," he said unctuously, "that I can hang around till she does. Dogs like me," he added with pride.

"Babushka is something more than a dog," Zoltan grumbled, never concealing his dislike for Slidell.

That was lost on Slidell, so that Anna Sofia did not have to mitigate it. She warned Zoltan with a quick glance, and spoke direct to Slidell:

"I wanted to ask your advice on a matter of great importance to me," she began. "I couldn't talk with you back there at supper, with so many greedy ears about the place. I wonder if I've not done something very, very foolish."

Slidell, with inebriate chivalry, declared:

"Not on your life, you haven't."

"Wait and hear what I have done," she laughed. "It is about that man—what was his name?—Mr. Creighton, who sat next me at supper. As a matter of fact, it was your very evident respect for him that led me to commit myself to his advice."

"Well, that is a relief, if it is only a case of taking his advice," Slidell returned.

"Not so simple an affair. In my case it is rather important. I have been so unwilling to trust my affairs to any one here in New York. Do you really think I am doing wisely to go to Mr. Creighton concerning my investments?"

"Absolutely" — Slidell stumbled around in mental fog to discover the right appellation to apply to her—"Mrs.—Ronai. You couldn't find a better man."

"I wonder if you are right," she mused. "Tell me all you know about him. You don't mind telling, do you? There was something you were talking about with him—some railroad stock, wasn't it? Tell me, so that I may form my own judgment of the man."

"You've come to the right party to find out about Vance Creighton, Mrs. Ronai. That is, you can find out as much from me as from any one, though that's not a great deal. He's a hard man to know, and his business is harder yet to know. But, as it happens, I've got inside dope on him. You see, an old friend of mine in the newspaper game is one of the financial reporters on the *Sphere*, and he gets a lot of inside dope on the Street, and passes it on to me."

"The Street?" she queried, and knit her brow.

"Wall Street. You see, Creighton's made sort of a name for himself down there by standing up and fighting C. P. Hanrahan. Well, you've got to respect a man——"

"Who is C. P. Hanrahan?"

"C. P. Hanrahan, the railroad man?"

Slidell's voice expressed amazement that she did not know.

"Oh, yes; go ahead, please!"

"You've got to respect a man like Vance Creighton, whose father left him flat broke on account of that Benz corner, coming back so hard that he can throw a monkey wrench into C. P. Hanrahan's gear box."

"I don't understand," Anna Sofia replied in real perplexity.

"The point is this: C. P. Hanrahan gets everything all set pretty for his railroad merger that'll give him a through trunk line covering all Eastern seaboard ports clear to Atlanta and New Orleans, and then he finds out that one Vance Creighton, operatin' on a shoe string and his friends' pocketbooks and unlimited gall, has got the C. & S. C. tied up so old Hanrahan can't touch it without paying through the nose for it. You heard me trying to get out of Creighton to-night how much longer he can hold out on it, didn't you?"

"Something like that."

"Well, that's the point of the whole thing. C. P. Hanrahan won't pay the price, I understand, because he doesn't believe that Creighton, operatin' on borrowed money, can stand the gaff. So C. P. is just sittin' back and waitin' for Creighton to go bust; but it's been that way for six months now, and Creighton seems to be hangin' on like a bear to—excuse me."

"Mr. Creighton has no money, you say?"

"Just what little he picked up on the Street since he came back from the war. My friend Tucker says he must have mortgaged all his friends to the hilt on his mere word. Then, too, a lot of C. & S. C. stock is held abroad—big cotton railroad, you understand, and Creighton's got a pile of friends over there—war service, you know. Legion-of-honor man, cited by British war office while he was in service before the U. S. even entered the war. So my friend

Tucker guesses that Creighton's using them foreign proxies in some way or another. Still, all that is sort of hazy to almost every one, I guess, but old C. P. Hanrahan. And he, the old fix, is simply sittin' back and waitin' for Creighton to go bust, like I told you."

Slidell, very satisfied with himself for his wealth of knowledge to pour into the eager ears of this fascinating woman, stopped only for want of breath to continue. As for Anna Sofia, she had leaned back into the dark corner of the car and was stroking the silky hair of her wolfhound, so that he could not see what sort of an impression he had made on her. Presently she spoke:

"Thanks very much for all this, Mr. Slidell. I shall think it over carefully."

"But don't you tell Creighton I told you a word about all this. He's the kind of man I'd like to develop into a friend, if I could, and if he guessed that I'd been spilling his business to any one he——"

Anna Sofia interrupted him impatiently.

"How could I tell him, my friend, without admitting to him why I should have asked you questions in the first place—that is, without admitting to him that I didn't trust him? So, you see, I am rather in the position of begging you not to tell him that I asked concerning him."

"I guess we're both in the same box, as far as that's concerned," Slidell said with some satisfaction.

Her car drew up in front of the Regent. As they dismounted, Slidell stood about rather wistfully.

"If there's anything else you'd like to know, ma'am, I'm yours to command."

"Not to-night, thanks. It is too late. I should like you to dine with me soon. May I let you know through Brockton?" she asked.

"Sure thing! He'll pass on to me right away any invitation you want to

give me. Or if you want my telephone number——"

"Good night, and again thanks so much," she said, and turned to Zoltan, who seemed continually to be studying Slidell as a rare and interesting breed. "Zoltan, will you come up with me for a moment?" Then she explained to Slidell: "Herr Zoltan and I have something to discuss concerning Hungarian societies, which couldn't possibly interest you."

And as the revolving door of the hotel shut her from sight of the street, she seemed to become a different woman—a woman exalted as with a triumph over all the foes of earth. Zoltan, obeying the unusual command with his well-schooled *savoir-faire*, plainly marveled at her on the way up in the elevator, but held his speech until they were in her sitting room. Then, even the life-jaded Zoltan could not cloak his amazement.

"Before Heaven, Anna Sofia, you are a different woman from the one who went to that supper to-night. What elixir has got into your veins?"

She threw off her cloak and turned to him with flaming eyes.

"Oh, but you heard what he told me, did you not? Did you hear, or did you not hear?" she cried in some strange sort of ecstasy.

He watched her with intense admiration, and still more astonishment.

"You mean that queer fellow's talk? The one who rode here with us?"

"Of course, of course!"

"I heard it, without understanding in the slightest. All that talk of finance is cabala to me. Why should it so much exalt you?"

"Can't you guess?" she returned, staring at him, though one might guess without seeing him.

"No, of course I can't guess. You frighten me a little."

"Did you think I came to America to see you?"

"You mean you've found the man——" Zoltan dared scarcely speak the word.

"Yes; Major Creighton! Major Vance Creighton." There was an ungovernable hatred in her voice. "Zoltan, do you not hate the name as I do?"

"But are you sure?"

"Oh, completely! Did you not hear him?"

"No; I did not hear what you said."

"No matter. You wrote me as the woman without peace; now, Zoltan, in weeks, perhaps even in days, you shall write me as the woman of eternal peace. Does that mean anything to you, who know my life? Have I not reason for exaltation?"

"But what can you do? How get peace?"

"Make him suffer as he has made me suffer."

"Not so simple, Anna Sofia. He is clever and rich. Tell me, does he suspect the connection?"

"Never! He does not know my husband's name. How, then, could he suspect?"

"Anna Sofia, really, I would advise you against——"

"You advise against it, when you know my life? When you know that peace can come to me only by making him suffer as he has—— Zoltan, you are in your dotage."

"But you must not forget that he is strong, powerful."

"You must help me, Zoltan."

"I help? How?"

"Take his woman away from him, in the first place. She's his source of strength. I could see that. It's only for her he is doing all this."

"Miss Hale, you mean?"

"Yes; make her love you. Zoltan, you must do that. You can do it. You are clever, a man of the world, a man of her own kind, the kind she sees too little of, the kind that would appeal to her. Zoltan, you hear me? You must

do that. You can do it. Zoltan"—she was pleading with him now—"Zoltan, you can do it. Almost you have made me love you; perhaps I shall if you succeed in this. Would not that be reward enough for your finest efforts? And then you shall write me as the woman of eternal peace. Zoltan, is it not worth it?"

"Anna Sofia, are you goddess or devil?" demanded Zoltan, recoiling a little.

"So far as you are concerned, that depends on how well you succeed."

"And is that literally a promise you make me of yourself?"

She thought a moment.

"Yes, it is a promise. That, too, is worth it. Make her love you, Zoltan, and I shall marry you and be faithful to you all my life exactly as if I loved you. Now go, and leave me alone, before I become frightened at myself and recall my promise."

CHAPTER III.

Creighton found himself next morning regretting that he had, in the fit of rebellion the night before, asked Anna Sofia to come to his office at all. Giving advice to a woman concerning her investments was not one of the favors he cared to perform—whether for Anna Sofia or any other woman. The resentment which he felt at having been led into the trap, however, kept him unconsciously alert for her coming, no matter how he was to evade the issue. And he began to know something of disappointment as the afternoon wore away with no sign of her.

Toward four o'clock Penelope Hale called him by telephone.

"Are you very busy?" she asked.

"Nothing in the world to do."

"I've just had such a beastly rehearsal, Brockton and Zoltan quarreling, and Zoltan spreading himself like hot butter to please me, and—and,

Vance, I'm tired of everything. Couldn't we run out to Great Neck or some place for a quiet dinner, and be back in time for the curtain? And besides, Vance, I have something I must tell you."

"I'll be at the theater in just—just twenty minutes," Creighton replied eagerly. "An hour for dinner and make the theater by eight sharp."

"You are good! And may I ask you—has Madame Ronai been to see you yet?"

"No. Did you know she was coming?" he asked in some surprise.

"I heard you across the table last night. She's not been there yet?" Rather a direct question!

"No," he repeated. "I was silly to let myself in for any such promise. But"—and here his voice dropped to one of banter—"if you will take Brockton's commands, and surround yourself with a bevy of sycophants—"

"Vance, if you waste so much time talking nonsense, your twenty minutes will have run away before you start."

When she had rung off, Creighton telephoned to have his car sent from its uptown garage to the theater, and himself reached the stage door almost simultaneously with it. He greeted the doorkeeper, and, by tacit permission, went at once to her dressing room. There he found Zoltan, looking, to Creighton's eyes, very fussy and pompous and important in his sable-collared coat and his monocle. Zoltan—so it appeared to Creighton—was rather unctuously defending Penelope's interpretation of her last three lines of the second act, as against Brockton's more stagy suggestions—so, at least, Penelope explained to him after their greeting.

"I am all but ready, Vance," she said. "I needed a heavier coat, and sent Janet home for one at least half an hour ago."

Zoltan went on talking. Penelope listened with interest, for the man's speech was clever. Creighton's eyes, wandering, fell upon a huge bunch of

sweet peas upon her dressing table, which had not come from him. He felt that Zoltan's queer, inquisitive glance was fixed upon him, and therefore permitted himself to show no concern. Probably Zoltan's flowers. Well, no matter!

Penelope's maid came back with the heavy cloak. Zoltan lingered over leave-taking. Then they were away out over that far-flung spider's maze that is Queensboro Bridge, into the crisp, snow-boding air of Long Island.

Once clear of the heavier traffic, Creighton asked her:

"Why were you so solicitous about Madame Ronai?"

"I'm somehow afraid of her—for you. I think she means some harm to you."

"More harm to herself, if she takes my advice on investments," he returned blithely.

"Don't take it too lightly, Vance. I heard something to-day which makes it seem to me all the more probable."

Creighton was mildly interested for the second.

"Yes?"

"Yes. She gave Slidell a lift last night on her way to the hotel. I heard him telling Brockton about it this afternoon."

"What has that to do with me?"

"Why should she give a lift to him, of all people there?"

Creighton laughed.

"Perhaps she took a fancy to him."

"You know how impossible that would be."

"Well, what is your reason for her perverted interest in a man like Slidell?"

"To pump him about you, and your business."

"Then she got very little out of him, and that little is probably false. Depends on how much he told her of what I told him. And you may rely on it that I tell a man like Slidell very little that is true."

"But do tell me this, Vance: could a woman like that harm you if she really wanted to?"

"I dare say she might."

"I mean, your business. I know absolutely nothing about it. You've never told me any of the details. I suddenly resent the fact that you have told me so little. I want to know all about it."

Creighton, under the cover of the early dusk, smiled to himself rather indulgently. Why in the world should Penelope Hale take so much of an interest in his affairs, save only that she saw Anna Sofia Ronai interested? Women were queer. Funny little streaks of jealousy cropping out now and then where a man would least expect them to show. Fancy his saying anything about the flowers he had seen on her dressing table. Yet withal he was rather pleased about it; pleased that Penelope should find an interest, of whatever source, in his prosaic business. He was inclined to pamper her a bit on the point, but at the last decided to tell her of it as man to man.

"You know in a big, general way about it, don't you, Penelope?"

"Only that you're fighting Hanrahan about some railroad stocks or other. I suppose because it was Hanrahan who ruined your father."

Again Creighton laughed.

"You guessed that part, too, eh? I wonder how many other people in New York have guessed the same thing."

"It is true, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is true, in some respects. At least, it was the watching out for him that led me into this thing—keeping my eyes constantly open for a chance to pinch him as he pinched dad. But the big thing, of course, is that you need money, Penelope, and I need it, too. We need it together. Until I've made my killing— Still, time enough to talk about that when and if I do."

"No one ever does anything with one

sole motive, I suppose. Your chief motive, I imagine, is that you like to do things. But never mind motives; tell me facts."

"You won't tell a soul—cross your heart and hope to die?" he safeguarded himself jocosely.

"Vance!"

"Well, then: about two years ago old Hanrahan began knocking the bottom out of the stock of certain railroads, for no readily apparent reason. I gambled that he was fixing to get control of the one possible trunk line left from here to New Orleans via the coast ports. I looked into the matter, and found that, if he tried to put that scheme through, his only possible connecting link was the C. & S. C. He hadn't yet touched the stock of that road. It was away down anyway, through inefficiency and—oh, many reasons. He'd probably banked on buying that in last, since he could do it any time. Then, too, the chief stockholders were abroad. It was built on English and French capital to start with, and you know how they hang on to their investments."

"And that is why you went abroad last year?" she guessed suddenly.

"Exactly. I thought I had a chance to beat him at his own game. I mortgaged myself for the next ten years, and put the whole sum into a syndicate with some good friends of mine to buy in quietly what stock could be had in the open market, and went abroad to see what I could do about influencing those fellows over there to come in with me, and hold out on C. P. for a higher price—make him pay through the nose, you understand, if he wanted our little connecting link of a railroad; make him pay out some of that money he made by knocking down the stock of the other roads."

"One way and another I got them lined up over there, though it was a deuce of a job; got 'em lined up to promise to stick, all of us together, for

a certain price from Hanrahan. The stockholders over there got up a joint committee. Two of the men I was in service with—Captain Dugan Leslie for the British interests, and Etienne St. Augier for the French—were made chairmen of the committee, and promised to hold their stockholders together with me."

"Oh, then you're sure of making a lot of money from Hanrahan."

"If only it were so easy as that, Penelope!"

"But if you possess or control what Hanrahan must have——"

"But how much longer can I hold on to what I have control of? Hanrahan now is playing a waiting game—thinks he can outwait me, and that I must soon begin to unload my own holdings because I can't carry the interest charges."

"Of course. I hadn't thought of that."

"And if he does do that, I'm done forever; and I'll have brought a bunch of my friends down with me, too. And, on the other hand, he may not want what we have—that is, he might give up the idea of his merger altogether, rather than pay our price. Though I doubt if he'll do that, because he's set his heart on his trunk line as the one lasting monument to leave to the next generation of the great name of Hanrahan."

"One scarcely thinks of a man like Hanrahan giving up any pet idea."

"You are right there. And—third danger point—Hanrahan's been feeling out the French and English syndicates, or committees, or whatever you choose to call them, with a view, I gather, to forcing them to sell me out, or urging them or frightening them into betraying me in order to protect themselves. In that case, again, I'm done in. So you see, it's not an easy road I'm traveling just now."

"Oh, but if your friends, Leslie and

St. Augier, stick by you, you are safe enough; are you not?"

"But you forget that they have their own responsibilities to their stockholders. If they back out on their own judgment, I can have nothing against them. I expect them to stick to me only so long as they have faith that I can do as well for their stockholders as any one else can do. But I don't expect them to advise their stockholders to stick to me when they feel the ship is sinking."

"In other words, so far as I understand it, Vance, any one could give the foreign stockholders a tremendous price for their stock, and so defeat you."

"Yes, but no one is going to do it except old C. P. Hanrahan himself, and he's too canny. It's a case of values with him, after all."

"But if he—or any one—should find it worth while, you could be ruined as easily——"

"Remember this, Penelope: that I know values about as well as Hanrahan himself. There, now you will think me a conceited ass. And I've put a proper price on what I have."

They drove along now for some moments in silence, each reveling in the hearty sting of the winter wind upon their faces, each one, be it confessed, marveling at life, and at the other. After a time Penelope said:

"Tell me, Vance, have you ever known Anna Sofia before?"

"No, dear, of course I haven't. Never set eyes upon her before last night."

"Are you absolutely sure?"

"Most completely."

"And have never done anything that might arouse her hatred of you?"

"Never a thing, so far as I know," he returned blithely again.

"I suppose I am silly, but I am—I really am afraid of her for your sake. I don't know why. The way she looked at you at supper last night; perhaps something in the feeling out of this play

of Zoltan's—"The Woman Without Peace"—which he confesses he wrote from her inspiration, which I must know and feel so well to interpret it at all. I don't understand it all, Vance."

"And perhaps," he joked with her, "it's the wolfhound, as it was last night."

"Please, Vance, don't ridicule me."

"Then let's get on some subject not quite so ridiculous as that harmless woman's hatred of me. Oh, Penelope, I am sorry, but it does sound so ridiculous to me. I do appreciate your solicitude, but what on earth could Anna Sofia do to me? I promise you to watch out, as I would watch in any case. Now let's get off her and her wolfhound, and just talk. I mean—just talk."

Penelope, with some mental reserve, fell—outwardly, at least—into his mood of alternate silences and banter; listened to his talk of cars and golf and of Ranger, his big, chestnut saddle horse, every word of which she knew by heart and each time liked to hear; permitted him to amuse her throughout dinner, while always she had this other matter in the back of her head; and thus in distraught fashion played the companion to him on the way back.

As they threaded once more through Fifty-ninth Street and down Seventh Avenue as a church clock tolled eight, Creighton asked if they might have supper together after the theater.

"I'm sorry; not to-night," she said.

"Oh, you'll be very tired, of course."

"Not that. I've an appointment—of sorts."

"Oh!"

"With Zoltan. He wants to take me some time to a native Hungarian place he knows—promises to be interesting. I think I shall go with him to-night."

"But do you know what you are running into?" Creighton protested with the first word that came to his lips.

"Oh, Zoltan is perfectly dependable. I think he might be interesting, too."

And oddly enough Zoltan, with monocle and sable coat and ivory-topped stick, met them at the stage door just as they drew up, quite as if he had been informed of the exact hour of their arrival.

"There the rascal is, waiting for you, quite as if he had a right to," Creighton made partly mock complaint.

"You must remember that he is European, after all."

"Meaning?"

"That his attentions to women are perfection and a little more than that."

"When he wants to make them so," Creighton said, as he brought his car to a stop.

"Yes, perhaps. I'll have just time enough to dress for the curtain, so I think you'd better not come in with me to-night. You understand, Vance?"

"Yes!" Creighton took his dismissal, and watched Penelope cross the pavement with Zoltan to the stage door.

CHAPTER IV.

In Creighton's mail, next morning, he found a letter from Anna Sofia. It said:

I am so sorry that unforeseen contingencies prevented me from coming this afternoon as I desired.

I can assure you that I shall avail myself of your kind offer of advice regarding investments, at my earliest opportunity.

Creighton shrugged his shoulders over it, wrote a reply equally formal in which he, perforce, held his offer open, but decried the soundness of his counsel, and advised her to go to her banker. With that he hoped, at least, that the affair was settled; and so, indeed, it was, for three days.

A three days that were so full of business for him that he had no time to think further of Anna Sofia, no time to do more than telephone Penelope by day; and Penelope seemed too tired at night to take advantage of his requests for a supper engagement.

She informed him that she had had a most interesting evening with Zoltan at the Hungarian restaurant that night; had met and talked with several of the Hungarian political exiles eking out the barest living in New York and living only on the hope of the restoration of their parties. Creighton gathered, all told, from her conversation, that she had found a new, temporary enthusiasm; guessed that Zoltan must be initiating her into it; and thus could guess that she was seeing rather a lot of Zoltan.

All very well for the present! He knew that he could rely on Penelope. And since he was just now far too worried over his deal in C. & S. C. to be a proper companion for any woman, he permitted Penelope to enjoy her new playmate in peace.

At the end of that three-day period of silence from Anna Sofia, she came into his office toward four o'clock one afternoon, looking lovely and piquant in her oddly fashioned turban of fur and bringing with her the zest of the keen December afternoon.

"And at last, my friend, I have come to see you," she greeted him.

"It is very good of you." Creighton thawed in spite of himself; no man could long keep up his fences against such a woman as Anna Sofia. Creighton went on, bringing her a chair: "When a man is jaded, the sight of a woman like you in these drab offices is an indescribable tonic."

"You should not work so hard. Still, that is the obvious thing to say. Mr. Slidell—you remember him?—told me something of the gigantic task you are engaged in."

There, thought Creighton to himself, went one of Penelope's arguments against Anna Sofia. For, if she really planned any evil against him as a result of confidential information gained from Slidell, she would be most likely to conceal the fact that she had talked with the man.

"Slidell, being a newspaper man, is undoubtedly inclined to make heroic that which is in reality very prosaic," he deprecated.

"At any rate, his accounts of you made me all the more eager to have your advice on my own little affairs."

Creighton began to put up his fences again.

"That, as I told you in my letter, is something which I am not qualified to undertake; something, I may tell you frankly, that I would rather not do."

"Oh, but I am what you call a 'good sport.' I can stand losses."

"But you must understand my position."

"Please! Here, you see, I have seventy thousand dollars or so in French third defense bonds."

To Creighton's astonishment, she drew from some concealed pocket in her coat, quite as casually as if it had been a letter she wanted him to post, a blue-linen envelope of the size generally used to contain legal documents. She laid the package on the desk in front of him.

Creighton, looking it over while he caught his breath—figuratively speaking, at any rate—saw that it was bound about with somewhat faded silk tape, and sealed in all possible places with great splotches of green sealing wax. With but slight knowledge of heraldry, he read the design printed in the wax, while he was seeking for his answer to her. The device was an unusual one of a lion and a stag counter, which he had an indistinct recollection of having seen before, but which did not now interest him enough to impel him to query concerning it.

She, seeing his reluctance, spoke again.

"Oh, they're quite all right, and no counterfeits," she laughed.

"I had no doubt—"

"And I am sure they are going lower. I wish you would take them and invest

them as you like—perhaps in your own affair. Would such a sum not be of some little assistance to you? I understand that you are having difficulty——”

“That, madame, would be simply unthinkable.”

“I don't know much about finance, but I am quite sure that, if you invested them in your railroad stock, and I lost, that it would not be your fault.”

Creighton laughed.

“I thought I should refuse you advice, but I see that in one respect I must give you advice. Do not invest your money in C. & S. C. now.”

“But your own money——”

“That is another horse of a different color.”

She looked puzzled, but continued:

“In any case, there are the securities. I am surer than ever now that your advice would be sound. Just take them and convert them for me into any holdings you see fit.”

“I can't do that. Really! Please do not ask me to. I couldn't take the responsibility for the investment of seventy thousand dollars of your money. Your bankers are the proper people to assist you on that.”

“I am so disappointed. I got them out of my safe-deposit vault uptown just this afternoon, especially to turn over to you.”

“If only you had asked me first——”

She made a little moue, playfully rebellious, though resigned.

“And you really refuse me——”

“I am sorry, but I must refuse you.”

She reached out her hand to take the envelope from him, but suddenly withdrew it again, and this time with a more serious impulse.

“But it has just occurred to me that——” She stopped there.

“What?” he prompted her.

“That the safe-deposit vault will be closed before I can possibly get back uptown. In fact, it will be closed now.”

“Yes, that's true.”

“I'm afraid to carry these about with me till to-morrow morning.”

“You really should have asked me, before you brought me the package.”

“Could you not keep them in your own safe for me overnight? I will send my secretary down for them the first thing in the morning.”

Creighton's forehead wrinkled in a frown which she could not fail to see.

“It seems the best thing to be done with them now.”

“You will do that for me?”

Creighton hesitated. It was, so far as he could see, the best thing to do now with the bonds she had. Could he in decency refuse to accept responsibility for them, even if he did take them into his keeping overnight? Again she seemed to read his hesitation with instinctive clarity.

“I shouldn't hold you responsible for them, of course, in case anything happens to them,” she said.

“Even that would scarcely relieve me of feeling the responsibility for them.”

For the first time now her mobile face expressed impatience, even dislike for the situation she had entered upon with so much of apparent disingenuousness. That look hurt Creighton's conscience for a moment. Women were a nuisance in business, anyway; especially one so unschooled, so inept in it, as Anna Sofia was. Penelope's warning seemed to have made him overcautious.

“I will take charge of your package until to-morrow morning,” he said.

“Thanks very much. You can't guess what a relief it is to me,” she declared to him, and her sudden change of expression bore mute witness to the fact.

Creighton wrote her out a hasty receipt. Then he asked her to write her name on the outside of the otherwise blank envelope, and gave the package to his secretary to be shut in the safe.

Her thanks were impressive and engaging. He felt a twinge of conscience for his overcaution as he bowed her out.

She paused for one last word on the threshold.

"Could you not come to lunch at the Regent with me to-morrow and bring me the parcel yourself? It would obviate any difficulty in the identification of my secretary, whom I must otherwise send for it."

"I regret very much that I cannot see my way clear to give the time to it to-morrow," Creighton said with an air of finality. "We American business men are——"

"Yes, I know. Well, I shall send a signed order, and you can compare the signatures."

"And that, I think, will be quite safe enough."

But all that matter of the return of the bonds was quibbling in vain.

Creighton came down to the offices next morning to find havoc let loose upon him. Instead of the usual orderly quiet of the early morning, he found clerks huddled in consternation about two police officers who were transcribing the excitement into notebooks, and his secretary vainly trying to get him on the telephone. An hysterical telephone girl saw him first, and cried at him:

"Burglars! Your safe was blown open last night."

A police officer said something, seemed to try to bar Creighton's way to the door of the bookkeeper's office, where the safe was, but tried in vain.

Creighton, oddly enough, found himself thinking that he had no idea a blown safe could look so orderly. One of the great doors hung by a hinge; the other lay flat on the floor. Papers scattered around. Not so much confusion, really, as he had to admit there was in his own mind.

In that vast crowd—or so it seemed—that backed him up as he inventoried the damage, he found the bookkeeper.

"Have you checked up on losses?"

"The petty cash was——"

"Oh, damn the petty cash!" He found his secretary there. "Have you checked up?"

"No! The police——"

"Those syndicate contracts——" He looked even as the thought occurred to him.

Silence fell while he looked for that most valuable of all his dossiers.

"Gone!" he had to say, staring blankly around at his office force.

"Then it's Hanrahan's doings," pronounced the bookkeeper mournfully.

"What's that?" demanded one of the police.

"Never mind what it is."

His secretary reminded him at this point.

"And the package which that woman left with you?"

"Where did you put it?"

She told him.

"Gone!" Creighton had to say again.

"What's that? What's that?" the police demanded again.

"Never mind," said Creighton.

The rest of that morning was a chaos of questioning, by the police, of the entire office staff, and of Creighton himself. And the only result obtained then was that Creighton, by sheer moral force, bulldozed the authorities into promising no publicity concerning the loss of Anna Sofia's package.

"It'll break me just as sure as it is known. Every bank in the city that I owe money to will be on my shoulders, refusing renewals, showing me straight through to—ruin. I don't know what the package held. But I want it kept quiet."

For the rest, there was not much to give out in the way of news—a couple of hundred dollars in cash gone, some documents of one kind or another—Hanrahan wouldn't stoop to that, of course, even though it would be most valuable to him to know all the details of that agreement—and Anna Sofia's

package. Of that there must be no mention made.

A man purporting to be Anna Sofia's secretary came on the scene before the inquisition was over. In answer to his errand, Creighton pointed grimly to the police, and to the wreckage, and promised to see Anna Sofia at the earliest possible moment.

And, advising her by telephone of his coming as soon as he could get away, he went up to her hotel. He found her awaiting him, alone except for the white borzoi, which was stretched out at length on the huge sofa at her side. She, it appeared, had just finished lunch, and was having coffee and kummel from a little taboret in front of her. The service had been for two. She indicated a chair which she requested him to bring up for himself, and watched him closely as he did it. But her scrutiny was gone as soon as he had seated himself near her, and she was pouring his coffee.

Her secretary had paved the way for his information, in so far as his own telephone message had failed to do it.

"At least your misfortune has brought me this pleasure of seeing you here," she told him as he lighted a cigarette with fingers none too firm yet. "Tell me, did you lose much?"

"Documents only. I am very sorry. I shall do my best to—can we not come to some adjustment——"

"Let there be no talk of adjustment. Was not the responsibility mine? If the police chance to recover the bonds, then you may let me have them. If not, the affair is a closed book between us. The police, I suppose, will institute a search?"

"Oh, yes."

"And one hears so much about the efficiency of the New York police force."

"You are magnanimous."

"Let us talk no more of it," she requested again. "It is now on the knees

of the gods. Already it is a distasteful subject to me."

The result was that Creighton spent a most agreeable half hour with her, and finally tore himself away from her only through the sense of urgent demands calling him downtown.

After he had gone, Anna Sofia sent for copies of the early editions of the evening papers, and, after diligent search through the latest of them, found the burglary mentioned only in a four-line paragraph at the bottom of an obscure column. Of her own loss there was no mention.

It would have needed no close observer to gather that she was much disappointed in this fact. After several minutes of thought, and of communication with Babushka in their mutually understood talk, she called Brockton's office at the theater, and left word there that she desired Slidell, their publicity man, to come to her at five that afternoon.

After that, in a carefree mood, she went shopping, and for a drive in the Park, and returned toward five to find little Slidell awaiting her.

He, of course, was infinitely delighted at the summons, and concealed no sign of it. She took him up to her sitting room, ordered tea, found cigarettes and whisky for him.

"I wanted to see you," she explained when tea came, "because you are the only man of my acquaintance who knows the newspaper business as it appears to be conducted in this country."

"You've come to the right party, Mrs. Ronai."

"This affair of the burglary in Mr. Creighton's offices, for example—did you know about it?"

"I saw the item. I don't know any more than that about it. I guess likely it's some of Hanrahan's doings."

"Yes; but the amazing part of it to me is that there is so little space given to it, so little of detail."

"Are you specially interested in it?" he asked, with as much surprise as little Slidell could be expected to show.

"Rather, yes!" She told him briefly to what extent. "And it seems to me so queer," she continued, "that there is no mention made of my loss. It would seem to me that publicity would help to recover the bonds."

"You can't tell, ma'am," Slidell remarked wisely.

"But do you think that Mr. Creighton is being honest with me about them?"

"Why, I guess so. Of course, Creighton is pretty hard pinched for cash now, and seventy thousand—Still, he's Vance Creighton."

"But why on earth," Anna Sofia demanded, "should he keep my loss out of the newspaper?"

"I can find out for sure if you like."

"No, I'd rather you didn't mention it to him. Again it would show lack of confidence in him. I do want your personal opinion about it, however. Do you think he has purposely kept my loss out of the newspaper?"

"Shouldn't be surprised."

"Why?"

"Number one guess: maybe he doesn't want Miss Hale, or any of his other friends, to know that he has been such a fool as to take any such sum of money from you. Second guess: if it was known generally that he had lost any such sum from his safe, no matter whose money it was, it would bring all his creditors down on him like a shot. They're the only two guesses I've got, if it was Creighton who kept the details out. Might have been the police who did it, though."

"Can you find out about that, with certainty? If it was Mr. Creighton, I shall have to begin to suspect something. If it was not he, then my mind may rest easy. If you would be so good!"

"Easiest thing in the world for me to find out."

"And if it has been purposely kept out of the papers, is there any possible way by which I can make sure of proper publicity being given to it?"

"As to that, ma'am, if it was the police, or even Creighton with the connivance of the police, who kept the business out of the papers, you probably wouldn't get the editors to touch it."

Anna Sofia hesitated over that reply of his, and presently asked him:

"Will you please find out all you can for me, without telling Mr. Creighton, and let me know—this evening, if possible. I must put my mind at ease concerning Mr. Creighton."

"Sure thing, Mrs. Ronai. I'll find out all about it and let you know in less than an hour."

CHAPTER V.

Every morning paper, the next day, carried this advertisement, boxed in heavy, black, eye-arresting borders, two columns wide by two inches deep:

\$10,000 REWARD

is hereby offered for the recovery of fourteen French Third Defense Bonds of 100,000 francs each, numbered serially D3487 to D3501, stolen from the safe of Mr. Vance Creighton, Exchange Place, on the night of December eighteenth. A proportionate part of the reward will be paid for the recovery of any part thereof, or for information leading to recovery.

MULLAN & GARBAL,
Attorneys at Law.

To Penelope Hale, reading it over her rather late breakfast tray, the black-bordered set-up of the advertisement was indeed symbolic. Knowing little of Creighton's affairs, being unversed in matters of finance, it was, nevertheless, not difficult for her to guess what a knife thrust such a loss must be to Creighton at this critical stage of his endeavors. Moreover, the odd names of the law firm! Why not Creighton himself, or at least Creighton's own lawyers? There was food for thought which kept her occupied to the exclusion of all else over her breakfast.

Should she call Creighton, inquire, offer condolence, some comfort? She decided against it, for the present at least. She felt that she would be too ready to say, "I told you so." For there was little doubt in her mind that Anna Sofia was involved in the matter.

Shortly after noon, Creighton telephoned her. For that she was not surprised.

"Thank God you're in," were his first words, in a sort of gasp.

"Something I can do?"

"Have you seen this morning's papers?"

"That advertisement?"

"Yes! It's brought the avalanche on me, of course—the whole pack of wolves. Oh, nothing for you to bother about, Penelope, except that I do feel that I have to get away from all this, see you, talk with you—anything to get away from all this for a moment; and there's no way to get away from it except by seeing you."

"But what has happened exactly?"

"A thousand inquiries—answering them all morning—banks warning against renewals, investors—oh, everything. I don't want to bother you with details. Don't want even to discuss it. I simply want to get away from it for an hour. Will you let me lunch with you?"

"But do tell me a little more what has happened. It is Anna Sofia, of course."

"How did you guess?"

"The names of the lawyers, if my instinct hadn't told me. You know I told you——" But she checked herself there, and resolved not to say it again.

It was enough, however, to evoke rebuttal from him.

"But it's nothing deliberate on her part. I'm sure of that. It's only excess of precaution; perhaps even a desire to help me; certainly nothing more than an ill-judged attempt to recover her property."

Penelope was glad he could not see her grimace of impatience.

"But do tell me all about it. This is the first I had heard of the robbery, even. How did her bonds happen to be in your safe?"

Creighton reviewed the case to her in a few words, concluding:

"Of course she doesn't realize what she's done to me."

"Have you spoken to her about it?"

"Heavens, no! What earthly thing could I say to her? What opening to approach the matter? All I could say is that she's come mighty near ruining me, however innocent her intentions. And I've had all I can stand, Penelope. I must get away from it for an hour or two. Can't we have lunch together? Because I know I would come back here, after it, far more able to see the thing through." He was pleading now.

She took a longish time over her answer.

"I am very sorry, but I have an engagement with Oscar Zoltan for lunch."

"Can't you chuck him this once, Penelope?"

"I don't quite see how I can. I mean—no, I can't, Vance."

"But I do need you so badly——"

"If I had had more notice of it—but it's too late now to ask him to change his plans."

Long silence from Creighton's end of the wire. Then:

"Of course there's no arguing against that," he said.

"No, I think not, Vance." And she would say no more than that, would not to any degree temper the harshness of her refusal.

Finally a good-by came from his end of the wire, which she echoed. She lingered a moment before she hung up the receiver, but heard no other sound than his breaking the connection. For a long time after that she sat very still, as if she were considering her decision. At last, however, and with the new energy

of specific resolution, she got Zoltan at his hotel.

"I shall be lunching at two, at Prince's, and alone. You may sit with me, if you care to."

Zoltan's answer may well be imagined.

"Perhaps," she continued, "I may make some explanation of my liberality when I see you. In any case, I hope you can amuse me."

So much arranged, Penelope had her car called, dressed slowly, and gave her chauffeur the address of Brockton's offices. There she found Slidell in the untidy little den of an office in which he sat by choice. He was on his feet instantly when he saw her in the doorway, and with a quick movement that was more of nerves than of haste, mashed out an eternal cigarette against an overflowing tray.

"I wish you would do me a favor, Mr. Slidell. I've come to you because I know no one better qualified to do it."

"Oh!" he ejaculated, in a tone of relief, one might have said.

"What are you frightened about?" she asked him, scanning him rather directly.

"Just a little shot in the nerves this morning, Miss Hale," he said with an uneasy laugh. "Out amongst 'em last night. Ticked to death to do anything I can for you. What'll it be?"

"Herr Zoltan has got me rather interested in the Hungarian Patriotic Bund. I wish you would find out for me the unadulterated facts about it—the sort of men that are members, what their real aim is, what their standing is in New York, and—and pretty well what Zoltan's standing is with them. Unadulterated facts, mind you, shorn of any of his enthusiasm, or your exaggeration."

"What in the world are you interested in that for?" he had to ask.

"I have already told you, haven't I? See if you can find out how long it has

been in existence, who its chief backers are—oh, any and all facts that might enable me to judge whether I should lend it my support."

Slidell smiled knowingly.

"Oh, sort of a credit report on the whole thing, eh?"

"Yes! Only an unbiased one. Don't take Madame Ronai's word for it."

Slidell grinned rather vainly.

"She's never told me anything about it."

"Oh, do you know her very well?"

"There to tea yesterday afternoon."

"You're getting on in the world. When can I have this information?" she asked.

"In a day or two, I reckon. I don't know exactly. I'll have to hunt up a few friends."

"As quickly as possible, please."

From Slidell's little office Penelope went on to Prince's, where she found Zoltan eagerly awaiting her. Already he had reserved a table—one that looked directly out on the Avenue, which teemed now with early afternoon shoppers buffeting the winter's first real fall of snow.

"You are wondering," she said, "why I have been so liberal with you."

"Must I wonder? Mayn't I assume—"

She interrupted him.

"You are likely to assume more than I am willing you should assume," she laughed. "I wanted amusement, in the first place, and you do that admirably. In the second place—yes, I will admit this to you—I did not want to go to lunch with Mr. Creighton, who begged me almost pitifully, and you offered the best excuse against it. And so I am here, and you."

She was conscious of Zoltan's direct scrutiny of her after she said that, and deliberately permitted it while she gave attention to the menu. She knew that Zoltan was asking himself questions concerning the state of affairs between

herself and Creighton, and chose to let him remain in a state of questioning.

He made no remark about it, of course. Thereafter he gave himself, with all the *savoir-faire* at his command as a result of his long and full life, to engaging her attention—to amusing her, as she expressed it. And so well did he succeed in this that, when lunch was over, she suggested that they devote the rest of the afternoon to driving out into the country in her car, as a relaxation against her appearance that night. Zoltan, pleased at his almost unexpected success with her, accepted eagerly.

And he returned from the drive in a state of exaltation unusual even for his mercuric temperament, left Penelope at the stage door, and went on and reported the news of the afternoon to Anna Sofia.

Anna Sofia's comment, after a moment of reflection, was this:

"She has heard, of course, of Creighton's evil fortune."

"You mean, rats desert the sinking ship," Zoltan remarked, taking umbrage at the implication.

Anna Sofia deftly ministered to his *amour propre*.

"Does the 'what' or the 'why' matter, so long as the fact is? I am very well pleased with you, Zoltan."

CHAPTER VI.

The rest of that day, to Creighton, spelled ruin and bankruptcy in imminent threat, inescapable certainty. The advertised loss of seventy thousand dollars from his safe, whether his own or another's, of whom he was for the moment a guardian, brought down upon him his whole pack of creditors, of private individuals, and of bank officers whom he had succeeded from day to day in placating only by his persuasive tongue, his belief in himself and his ultimate success, his very audacity.

Oh, some of them were, to be sure,

very nice, very sympathetic in his misfortune, but between the words of even these Job's comforters he read veiled threats, loss of confidence, a limit to further patience with or trust in him. One move by any of the least of these, one legal demand by any one of the most grasping, and his whole house of cards would totter and fall about him, crushing him in the catastrophe.

True, he had not yet acknowledged defeat even to himself—still less to any of those who called him up thus to inquire about his loss, to offer such condolences as really meant no pity. To them he was brazen, unmoved, steadfast in the truth that it was none of his legal liability. To himself he had to admit very few of them would believe his asseverations; that they would suspect and suspect, and when loans came due—but let them! When loans came due, some intervention of fate might at the last moment save him. In this prospect alone did he find hope against defeat.

Penelope's defection cost him dear in moral support, but he was given, throughout that wearying and desperate afternoon, no uninterrupted moment to think about it. What with police and detectives constantly searching for clews where clews there were none, what with telephone calls and personal calls from the bevy of those whose money he had invested for the most part on the pledge of his personal honor, there was not a moment left to him alone, until long after lower Manhattan had blazed out through a million windows and grown dark again; until subways had engulfed office forces that were like ants scurrying to rest for the night in the farthest reaches of the great city; until all the underlings of his own staff had gone and he was forced to send upon their way those who would have stayed by him—not until then did he have a moment for thought about Penelope.

Then, over a pipe in the darkness, as he gazed down, without consciously seeing, upon the snow-covered roofs and the bay, picked out from a snowy waste only by dim lights that marked scattered islands or ships abroad upon it, he gave thought to her.

Had Zoltan, by his cleverness, his mental stock and dexterity, indeed fascinated her? Or was she putting upon him a penalty for not having taken her ungrounded, her confessedly instinctive counsel against Anna Sofia? Was it possible that there was in Penelope's attitude a spark of jealousy, fanned to flame by his mere civility to Anna Sofia? Weary as he was, he was the more inclined to shift the blame to her and, in his own mind at least, to impute to her such motives as he, in sounder spiritual state, would not have believed existed in her.

He found small comfort in that attitude, however, and forced himself to take the other point of view: that the reason for her defection in this time of his grave need was something of a rebuke to him for having so much neglected her in the past few days. Of that, he knew, he was guilty.

Having come to that conclusion, he tried to ring her up to ask her to dinner. He found her, of course, not at home. He tried Brockton's offices; she had been seen there, at two o'clock, talking with Slidell. He tried the theater; she hadn't been there that day. Ah, well!

He knocked out his pipe and left the offices. Once in the street, in that system of deserted cañons that New York is at that hour, he found a peculiar zest in the keen, night air, in the sting of swirling snow against his face. He decided to walk home, all the way to East Sixty-fifth Street. He stopped in a chance restaurant on the way for dinner, and arrived at his flat, physically tired but mentally recuperated, toward nine o'clock.

Presently, when it was the time for the first entr'acte, he telephoned Penelope's dressing room. Her maid answered. Miss Hale was resting. Would she come to the telephone to speak with Mr. Creighton? It was the maid's voice that came to Creighton as he waited. Miss Hale would be too tired to see any one that night. Against that ultimatum, no plea, no argument.

Creighton mixed himself a stiff drink, and sat down with a book, of which he could read no more than the first two lines. Restless, distrait beyond belief! Penelope! That was queer, incredible. What on earth to do to pass the night? What to do to pass the time until he should see her?

The telephone rang—grateful interruption. Perhaps it offered some distraction, when theaters would have bored, clubs and friends have failed him because of the day's developments, and the publicity, the questioning that advertisement in the papers must bring him.

"Mr. Creighton?" Surely that was Anna Sofia's voice.

He frowned.

"Yes."

"Have you heard any news to-day?" came the query.

News, indeed! He had heard news enough.

"No, nothing of interest."

"Did you see my advertisement in the papers?"

"Yes."

"Rather clever of me, don't you think?"

"Oh, very. Excellent idea!" Creighton's voice was hollow in spite of his will to the contrary.

"I am very glad to find you in. Zoltan has deserted me quite, you know."

"Anything I can do?" came naturally to Creighton's lips. "Or, rather, mayn't I do something?"

"I've not yet seen any of your night supper clubs, you know."

What could one say?

"I'd be delighted. What shall it be? The Pisano? The Red Death? The Capuchins?"

"The Capuchins intrigues me most."

"So be it! May I call for you in an hour?"

"Yes. And bonds and business interdicted as a topic," she laughed.

"Useless preordination, so far as I'm concerned." And Creighton never meant it more.

The Capuchins—that unique place of medieval romance, with its dim lighting tempered by imitations of cathedral windows; with its monastic fittings, suggestive of full-bodied, if well-ordered, fleshly delights, of the choicest vintages brought from cavernous cellars, and epicurean dishes unknown to laymen; an atmosphere of the time when men were mighty at war and revelry, and women's favors were worth a life's blood. Nor, oddly enough, were jazz and dancing out of place there. The contrast seemed merely to lend an added zest.

Since they had come early, Creighton had no difficulty in getting a table next to the dancing floor. To his relief, he recognized none of the present occupants of the room. It was a situation he would have preferred to avoid—recognition by friends as the supper companion of this very lovely and obviously foreign woman, because recognition would lead to questioning. As it was, he found himself rather pleased at the admiring glances cast toward Anna Sofia, who, in her dress and carriage, stood out above any woman there.

The waiter, too, seemed to recognize her difference, and made deft and unusual suggestions of dishes not on the menu.

"Do you know," she said earnestly, after they had given the order, "I think you needed me to bring you out here to-night. You look very tired."

"The ordinary day, plus the little

commotion. Still, we were not to talk of business, were we?"

"True enough!" said she, perhaps a little disappointed. "It's the woman in me speaking out, I suspect. I hadn't before noticed that you were so tired. Please forget things. Let me amuse you to-night. I shall dance after a time. For the present may I not just talk to you? Of course, I know a few things—Miss Hale, I mean. But I think I can make you forget all that for a moment."

Creighton was at first inclined to feel resentment at this too-intimate mention of his personal affairs. But she seemed so naïve about it, so genuinely in earnest in her sympathy for him, that the sudden feeling was dissipated.

"I am sure that I should like nothing better than to have you amuse me," he said.

"I think," she went on, "that is one of the chief differences between American and European women: your American women seek distraction, whereas we European women distract. And I think a woman's province is to distract and relax her mankind. Did you not find that true while you were in Europe?"

Creighton dodged the issue.

"I don't know that I ever thought about it."

"Tell me some of your experiences in Europe. You must have met many interesting people, women as well as men. It is not at all unlikely that we may find some mutual acquaintances."

Before Creighton realized it, she had thus led him into reminiscences of war service which, taking him out of himself, both exhilarated and rested him. Clever woman she was! She had a way about her of watching him so keenly, with such complete absorption, as if every word he spoke were of the utmost interest to her. And thus the time passed until the after-theater crowds began to come in.

Among these, now and then, were acquaintances of his, who nodded and stared; but he no longer felt any repugnance at being stared at. Soon he suggested dancing, and danced with an abandon that suggested something of defiance. By the time they had resumed their seats, the crowd seemed to have come in, except for occasional stragglers who, by their infrequency, made their arrival all the more immediately noticeable.

"There," cried Anna Sofia suddenly, in a subdued voice, "is Zoltan and——"

Creighton looked, though he needed not to look to complete her announcement. Zoltan's companion was Penelope, of course, who—how vividly the maid's words recurred to him—was too tired to go out that night. Creighton's eyes met Penelope's as squarely and as certainly as if they had seen one another by appointment. She nodded at him, with a movement of her lips that might have been a smile, then turned abruptly away from him and spoke a word to Zoltan. The head waiter took charge of them and led them to the other side of the room, Penelope looking never so lovely with her dark masses of hair and the slim grace of her, Zoltan following behind, seeming, somehow, ludicrously like a pouter pigeon with his wide expanse of chest.

Creighton heard Anna Sofia speaking to him.

"She is very beautiful, is she not?"

He looked at her with steady eyes, that gave the lie to his inward commotion.

"Very," he said.

She studied him for a moment.

"I am so sorry. This is most unfortunate. Shall we go? Would you prefer not to stay?"

Creighton did not give his answer immediately. He looked at Anna Sofia as he had never before looked.

"You are a strange woman," he said abruptly.

"Shall we go, or stay?" she asked again, her eyes falling before his.

"Let us stay and dance as long as the place is open," he replied, and his voice was tense and raised above his ordinary speech.

Thus he might have addressed Hanrahan, and all the powers that were enlisted against him—a challenge to all the world except Anna Sofia.

CHAPTER VII.

Anna Sofia wrinkled her forehead for a moment over the announcement of the caller who came to her while she was at lunch the next day. Penelope Hale! Given her preference, Anna Sofia would have preferred not to see Miss Hale. But there was something strange, something decidedly unusual, about Miss Hale's coming to her in this fashion, so that Anna Sofia scarcely dared, for her own best interests, not to receive her.

She yielded gracefully.

She had Penelope come up at once. She left her lunch and, with the white borzoi constantly at her side, received her guest in her sitting room. There was nothing in Miss Hale's face, even to her own clear insight, that revealed mood or mission. Penelope's expression was the perfectly complacent mask of the accomplished woman. She refused coffee, took one of Anna Sofia's cigarettes, petted Babushka, and talked of her regal strain—in all things amiably formal, while Anna Sofia waited in growing impatience for the statement of her mission.

It came finally, when the hostess had endured all the trying suspense she thought she could.

"Herr Zoltan became rather communicative to me last night," Penelope said quietly. And she knew, without having to look for verification, that she had let loose a broadside against Anna Sofia.

Presently the older woman laughed a little.

"Zoltan, when he gets drunk, always gets silly and extraordinarily imaginative. Still, I suspect you know it without my telling you so."

Clever attempt at rebuttal for what Penelope was going to say, but one not altogether efficient. Yet Penelope was not quite prepared for her next step. And while she hesitated, Anna Sofia laughed again, and asked:

"Did he grow amorous, too? I can tell you, my dear, that Zoltan, when he is in his cups, or with a pretty woman, is——"

"Thanks, but all that is beside the point just now," Penelope interrupted. "I should like to ask you point-blank, though I know you will not answer me, what you have against Mr. Creighton."

"What I have against Mr. Creighton? How can you suggest such a thing? Are we not the best of friends? Did you not yourself see us last night?"

"Yes, I could not fail to see you two, seeing that you took such good care that he should see us. That, however, does not now so much matter. Mr. Creighton is a friend of mine, whatever else he may or may not be. So much, at least, is for you and for the world to know."

"And may you always be!"

"I really am in a quandary, Madame Ronai. I had the choice of going to him, or to you, with some information I have chanced upon, regarding the loss of your bonds, the blowing of his safe. Given the choice, I have come first to you."

Anna Sofia's face hardened.

"But why not to my lawyers? It is they who are authorized to receive the bonds, and pay the reward."

"You shall know very soon why I did not go to them. They would not believe what I should have to tell them, any more than Vance Creighton would believe it. He most assuredly would

not believe it; it is for that reason I decided to come first to you."

"I can't think what you are talking about. Surely Zoltan must have had some wild flights last night."

"You are for some reason determined to ruin Vance Creighton."

"And that accusation," declared Anna Sofia in a quick temper, "has already been satisfactorily answered, has it not? Surely any one who could have seen us last night——"

"It is useless to fence any further concerning that matter. You and I may as well understand one another. You have deliberately set out to ruin Vance Creighton, for some reason. You tricked him into taking charge of your bonds. Then you make a donation of twenty thousand dollars to the Hungarian Patriotic Bund on the condition that they furnish men to break into his safe, incidentally to get the bonds back for yourself, really to get hold of some of his valuable and confidential contracts. And, of course, advertising, as you did, the misfortune that befell him has undermined his financial credit."

"A strange, strange story! Surely Zoltan was——"

"Do not blame Zoltan for all of it. I have derived my information from various sources. I deliberately set out to get it mainly from him, however, and you can guess what chance he had to withhold it from me."

"You do amuse me! Zoltan has a longer head than that would signify," Anna Sofia retorted with spirit, almost too brazenly.

Penelope sighed with impatience at her reiteration of innocence, but made no attempt to argue against it. Anna Sofia understood her sigh.

"But, if you really believe all this you have been telling me, why did you not go to Mr. Creighton with it in the first place?"

"Because he would not believe it. Because, very likely, he would do nothing

about it if he did believe it. He would very likely take the blame on himself for having accepted the care of your bonds, and try to pull through it as best he could."

"And what do you propose to do about it?" Anna Sofia managed to cloak her growing nervousness.

"I have come to you to ask you to stop these plans that you have so carefully made against him, and to make amends by advertising the recovery of your bonds as publicly as you advertised their loss; to restore to him the contracts you have with his English and French syndicates; and to take no further steps in that matter—in other words, to make restitution as complete as you can before it is too late."

"If you would ask me to do things that are possible, I would be glad——"

"I am giving you this opportunity before I take the matter further, merely because you are a woman of my own standing——"

"How much further could you go, may I ask?"

"To the police, who are still stumbling along in the matter of the safe-blowing, without any clew to guide them."

"That would be rather a dangerous thing for you to do, would it not?"

"Perhaps; perhaps not. I hadn't thought about that, since I have decided to do it."

Anna Sofia spent a full minute stroking the long, white, silky hair of the wolfhound, in ruffling it up and curling it over her fingers until the beast drew back its upper lip. Then she desisted, and mollified it once more by caresses.

"I think perhaps my best plan," Anna Sofia said, after so long a time, "is to tell Mr. Creighton all you have told me, and take his advice on the matter."

"And I," said Penelope, "think your best plan would be to publish in all the morning papers advertisements saying that your bonds have been recovered,

and return to Mr. Creighton his contracts, and stop any future operations along that line. I shall watch for your advertisements to-morrow morning, and take their publication as a pledge to me that you will carry out the rest of my ultimatum. Yes, it amounts to that."

Anna Sofia lifted her eyebrows.

"An ultimatum? What a harsh sound the word has!"

"I had to give you your chance," said Penelope, "so that my conscience might be clear. If you fail me now, I shall feel quite free to go to the police with what I know, regardless of your standing and of my respect for you."

Anna Sofia put her hand on Babushka's collar as Penelope looked back from the door.

"Thanks very much for coming in," she said.

"Not at all," returned Penelope, as she left the room.

CHAPTER VIII.

As for Creighton, there had that day been projected into the historic fight for control of the C. & S. C. a mysterious, an incredibly powerful force.

From Dugan Leslie in London, who was chairman of the committee of foreign stockholders, Creighton received a cablegram:

Gebrueder Salomon of Frankfort offer ninety per share for complete holdings. Must counsel acceptance unless you submit better offer.

Completely incredible! A mistake, a joke! Creighton's first act after reading it was to have the cablegram verified through the cable company. Verification was prompt and exact.

Who on earth were Salomon Brothers of Frankfort? The name of the firm was indistinct in his memory. The foreign department of one of his banks furnished him meager information immediately by telephone. They were a firm of private bankers, rated high,

though of comparatively small capital as American financial houses go, and very rarely in American markets or investments.

All the more incredible! What house of such a nature should want control of the C. & S. C.? Who, indeed, but some one eager to wreck his plans, to ruin him? Who, then, but Hanrahan? Yet not Hanrahan. Never Hanrahan!

For the highest price Hanrahan would ever pay was eighty-six, and Creighton would have sold to him for eighty-five. Creighton doubted if Hanrahan, careful estimator of values as he was, would ever exceed that price. Hence he put Hanrahan out of consideration at once. Hanrahan certainly was not behind this offer of Salomon Brothers of Frankfurt.

A new and mysterious force! An incredible force, that hurled a fortune into the fight, to complete and needless loss, as if so many bank notes had been cast into a furnace. And for no reason, so far as Creighton could see, other than to balk his own plans and to ruin him.

And what to do about it? The affair of the safe robbery, though it had seemed intolerable at the time, though it seemed as if it had brought ruin upon him, was a simple thing to fight as compared with this. Against this there seemed no possible defense.

He could not honorably advise Leslie to refuse the offer. Leslie was too good a friend. He could not beg the Englishman to turn it down, for that would mean begging him to betray his stockholders. Leslie would be tossing a fortune away if he did not advise them to sell at this new, astounding offer.

But who had made that offer?

He dashed off a cablegram to Leslie:

Investigate Gebrueder Salomon's offer, their standing and ability to pay.

For the immediate present he could do no more than that. Leslie's investigation might reveal some joker in the

offer, something that might help solve the mystery which now so completely baffled any defense.

He could not guess how long he must wait before the answer to his cablegram came to him. London was five hours ahead of New York. Leslie had long since left his offices. Whether he had arranged to have cablegrams delivered at his home, Creighton did not know. The chances were against his being at home in any case.

But for the present there seemed to Creighton nothing better to do than sit in his offices and wait, on the chance that something might come from London that would relieve him, or offer some hope of putting up a fight.

The telephone rang. With weary resignation Creighton took down the receiver. It was Anna Sofia who had called him.

"I perceive," she told Creighton, "that I am going to be very lonely again to-night. I was wondering if I might once again call on you to relieve the tedium of being strange in New York, save for one friend who seems to have deserted me."

His voice broke in upon her speech in a way that could leave no doubt in her mind.

"I am very sorry. Not to-night," he said.

"Oh!" She stopped there, as if she had been hurt by his gruffness.

He apologized.

"I am sorry, but it has been a trying day for me. Some unexpected developments in business. No more than that."

"Your voice sounds as if the developments had been of vital importance," she said with sympathy now.

"Nothing less than that, I can safely say. Good of you to inquire."

"Perhaps if you were to see me to-night, or tell me about it, it might be a relief to you, even though I don't understand it," she suggested, pleading a little now.

"I regret very much that I cannot afford the time, and could scarcely force myself to be in the mood to see any one to-night."

"It must be something most unusual."

"It is. I may telephone you later, sometime. But not to-night."

"I couldn't think of interfering, then," she said, though her voice was warm with sympathy. "I shall see you later?"

"Please."

Creighton was grateful indeed when the conversation was at an end. He settled himself once more to the dreariness of waiting.

The December afternoon sped on to twilight. A flurry of snow advanced darkness by an hour, filling the air with myriads of snowflakes that swirled on a north wind outside his windows. Creighton watched them absently, finding in their intangible cohorts, which hemmed him in and brought darkness too soon upon him, something akin to this mysterious force that assailed him now—something he could not touch or grip, or choke or fight, yet which could smother and slay him.

He sat on in the darkness of the office. His secretary came in noiselessly, and would have retreated, out of deference to his mood, but that he spoke.

"You may tell the office force to go home," he said.

"Yes, sir. And Mrs. Ronai is here to see you. I thought I would tell her that you had gone. I guessed you might not want to see her."

"What on earth does she want? Yes, I will see her. I must, I suppose."

Creighton lighted the room brilliantly, and met her at the door.

"If you wouldn't come to me, I had to come to you," she announced herself with a rueful smile.

"I shall be small amusement for you, I am afraid."

"Is it so very bad, this new trouble that has come upon you?"

"Is it that that you have come to see me about?"

"No! But I may sympathize, mayn't I? Even though I do not know what it is all about?" she protested with alluring earnestness.

"Thanks! And I appreciate it highly." Creighton lingered over the end of his sentence, by way of invitation for her to tell him her business.

"I came to you about Miss Hale—Penelope. Has she talked with you lately of me?"

"How lately?" Creighton parried. He realized at once that he was being led upon dangerous ground, unless he chose to be inhumanly brutal to Madame Ronai.

She questioned him with her eyes. Creighton guessed what that question meant—one of more general import than she now had in mind—whether Penelope had talked to him of her at all.

Anna Sofia, however, limited her question's scope.

"Since last night; since she saw us together at the Capuchins last night."

"No, I've not seen her since then."

"Nor heard from her?"

Creighton wondered how long this rather impertinent cross-examination might last.

"No," he said very shortly this time.

He watched her narrowly. What was all this leading to? He ventured a guess to himself—jealousy on account of Zoltan, he thought. Passionate woman as she apparently was, probably spoiled by having had all her life her own way with men, Creighton could guess that she was bitten deep by the wound to her self-pride, which Zoltan had given her by his recent assiduous attention to Penelope. As he watched her, she seemed subdued, thoughtful, introspective.

When at last she spoke, she appeared to convey that she knew relief at something or other.

"Then, perhaps, I have been worry-

ing too much about this thing. After all, I'm afraid she is no better than the rest of us—merely feline. You will excuse my saying that, but it appears——”

Creighton broke in upon her halting speech.

“You will pardon my bluntness, but I should like to know what this is all about. I can scarcely think of Miss Hale as feline, you know. I have known her much longer than you.”

She smiled at him.

“You are very loyal to her, considering the Zoltan affair. I cannot think that is more than a passing—may one say mental—infatuation for him.”

“Thanks!” he said curtly.

“And still you're wanting to know why I have come to you?”

“Very much wanting to know how Miss Hale enters into it.”

“I must tell you, in self-defense. Though now I am sure she came to frighten me only because she is jealous of me; and equally sure she would not carry out her threat.”

“A threat?”

“Yes. Let me tell you. She came to see me at lunch time to-day, with the most preposterous tale which she, nevertheless, told me she believed.”

“Yes?”

“Please bear in mind that she confessed to me that she had the story from Zoltan himself, probably when he was in his cups. Zoltan, in his cups, or under the vital influence of a lovely woman, has a most vivid imagination.”

“We are very long in coming to the story,” Creighton told her.

“We have arrived at it now. She told me that Zoltan told her that I engineered the robbery of your safe, merely in order to ruin and bankrupt you. And that, if I did not advertise the recovery of my bonds in the same manner as I advertised their loss, that she would tell the police what she had learned concerning it.”

This statement brought vividly to Creighton's mind what Penelope had been constantly telling him, constantly warning him against. He stared at Anna Sofia, saying nothing.

She drew back from him in amazement.

“Upon my soul, you seem to believe it!”

“You are seeing too much with your mind's eye,” Creighton returned. “I was only thinking that, if you cared to ruin me, you chose a marvelously clever, and a marvelously effective, way to do it.”

“But why should I ruin you? Why on earth should I care to harm you, who have come to be so close a friend to me since I have been in New York?”

“I don't know why. I don't mean to say that you did care to ruin me. I didn't mean to give that impression.”

“But I have never seen you before I came to New York, never met you before. Why should I go to all that trouble and expense——”

“I didn't say that you had done it. I can scarcely be more explicit.”

She studied him.

“But you are so—so negative about it. If only you could be more positive. If only you could relieve my mind by telling me that you don't believe what she says, and that you will not believe it.”

“I don't believe it,” he said, though none too convincingly.

“Ah, what a relief! You can't guess how you have relieved me. Can you not tell me, too, that you will not believe it of me even if she tries to persuade you?”

“I can make no promises about what I may believe in the future. More than that I cannot say.”

“But I can't bear to have you believe that dastardly thing about me.”

Creighton's gesture was significant of the impossibility of saying more than already he had said.

"And you must remember, if she tries to argue with you against me, what motivates her rancor against me."

"What is that?"

"Her jealousy, of course. Still, it takes a woman to know a woman. That is why I dared call her feline. Though I suppose she is merely very strongly moved, and for that reason is trying to break up the friendship between you and me."

"Jealousy?" Creighton repeated blankly. "Why should she be jealous?"

"Of you and me."

"Oh, now I follow you."

Anna Sofia was deeply relieved again.

"And that, I am sure, is what has actuated her to take this step. Still, I think she will go no further with it. She will realize that you can scarcely be persuaded to believe it. She must realize that, or she would have told you about it before this. Don't you think so yourself, Mr. Creighton?"

"I must reserve opinion. May I be frank and say that I can scarcely impute such—such scurrility—to Miss Hale? However, I have not yet heard from her, and can say nothing."

"If you can only remember, if she does speak of it to you—still, it does seem so ridiculous, and I am so sure that she can't believe it herself, or she would have told you. Mr. Creighton, do you not believe it of me, that, if I heard such things about a man who was a friend of mine—you, for example—do you not believe that, to safeguard you, I should come straight to tell you of it before it was too late to save yourself? You do believe that of me, do you not?"

"If that is a hypothetical question, yes," Creighton said.

"Well, I am no better than she. So that, if she had really believed what Zoltan told her, she would have come to you with her information. Therefore, since she didn't tell you, she can't really believe it."

Creighton, as always, was noncommittal about it.

"Circumstances would appear to favor your conclusion."

"Circumstances?" she queried. "Oh, yes; you mean her sources of information. Zoltan in his cups, or with his imagination soaring because of being with her——"

"I hadn't particularly thought of that. Still, it is a considerable circumstance."

"If only you will bear all these things in mind when—and if—she speaks with you about the matter, could you not feel justified in using your influence with her to keep her from going to the police about the business? For nothing can come of such publicity, as you know yourself."

Creighton offered her a cigarette, and took one himself without lighting it. His gesture was indicative of rapt thought, as if he were playing for time.

She seemed apprehensive because he did not answer at once.

"Surely you can reassure me," she said, a little anxiously now. "You can imagine that I am somewhat upset at what she might do. Not but that I could prove my innocence, but—after all, a woman of my position, to be questioned by the police, perhaps to have to stand trial——"

"To that I can answer only that, if Miss Hale thinks it necessary to give the matter into the hands of the police, I doubt if my influence can stop her. Zoltan might be more effectual."

She was silent for a moment.

"Well, then, it doesn't matter," she said, "how it eventuates, so long as you retain your good opinion of me."

"Thanks! It is an engaging story you have told me. I find it leaves me in some confusion."

"I can't see why it should," she said, after scanning him closely for a moment. "It would seem as if I had only helped to clear up things for you."

"In a case like this," Creighton said,

always with that thoughtful expression, "a man is justified in speaking bluntly, I think."

Her voice was not so assured now.

"Oh, quite!"

"Then may I say that you have succeeded in clearing up but one thing for me. That is, that you have some duplicity of motive in all this."

"But how can you even conceive a hint of duplicity? I mean—how much does that lack of being an insult?"

"That is a woman's first defense. I must be harsh with you, or not speak at all. Which do you prefer?"

"Speak all you care to."

"Very well. I have been thinking hard all the time I have been listening to you here. It is useless for me to tell you all the meandering of my thoughts. You have based your entire case on a premise that I, at least, find entirely false—one that I cannot credit. But for that fact, you might have—yes, the word is 'deceived,' however much I hate to use it—but for that fact, you might have deceived me."

"And what is that fact?"

"You have based it on an entirely false estimate of the sort of woman Miss Hale is. That being wrong, your whole case falls to pieces. That having fallen, I can so easily follow your plots that I can believe of you nothing but duplicity."

"Unimaginable state of affairs! What if I am mistaken——"

"The whole affair falls too easily into place on the assumption that you are playing some sort of game with me. Miss Hale would not accuse you of having engineered the theft of your own bonds unless she had some good reason to do so. Whoever stole the bonds stole the contracts which I have made with my European agents covering the C. & S. C. deal. Whoever stole those would know that I could be driven into final ruin by buying up those foreign stockholders away from me. That has been

done. No one would do it but some immensely rich person who desired to ruin me. Do you not see how much easier it is for me to believe in your duplicity than in your honesty?"

"But I? Why under heaven should I want to ruin you?"

"That I do not know. But there is no one in Europe but you who could do it. So, perhaps, you will tell me why you have ruined me?"

"What you tell me is both ludicrous and impossible. I have never in my life been so insulted." Anna Sofia rose to go.

"If I am wrong—and now I have means of finding out very soon—I can assure you that no one could make humbler apologies than I."

She lingered now, plainly fearing to go, plainly fearing to ask him questions that demanded answers, plainly fearing even him as he arose and stood before her, strong and masterful in his self-confidence, yet always deferent to her, even though she tried to maintain before him an attitude of defiance, of wounded self-pride.

"But how can you find out? How can you clear me?"

"I should be very foolish indeed to tell you that."

"Then you don't intend to treat me even with decent justice? Not with decent consideration?"

"With all that I can spare to you—and no more. If you have entered the lists against me, we must fight as of equal strength."

She studied him for a moment, her blue eyes ablaze, her small figure seeming to increase in stature.

"Very well, then, we fight. But not as of equal strength. I am stronger than you, not because I am wealthier than you, but because I have a sanctified purpose. That gives me the power that has ruined you already financially. That ruin is but half. I shall fight you in the open, and win, and win until your

ruination is complete, until your head is beaten into the dust, and you have suffered as you have made me suffer."

Creighton bowed.

"At any rate, we understand the rules of the game, if we do not understand the reason for it. So be it. And I am content."

"And I. I shall see you later. Au revoir, monsieur."

CHAPTER IX.

Anna Sofia returned at once to her hotel. She telephoned to Zoltan even before she took off her coat. Fortune favored her in that she found him in his rooms, trying to decide for himself the important affair of dinner.

"Will you come to me at once?"

His answer was affirmative, though half-hearted.

"Poor soul!" She smiled to herself as she hung up the receiver. "Yet he deserves it. He has used women enough in his time, and for his own purposes. Let him pay for it."

She dressed herself again with care for Zoltan. The ten minutes or so that elapsed before his coming she spent in stroking Babushka's fur in some nervous fashion that seemed to irritate the dog. Then abruptly she changed mood and manner, and buried her head in the silky locks.

"No, I shall not be silly nor faint-hearted now that I am so near the end of it. I must remember that the mistress of Babushka is not like other women; that she is above petty emotions."

Zoltan came to her, looking as jaunty and smug and self-satisfied as ever she had seen him look. She scrutinized him with all her keenness of understanding. He appeared to be well masked against the fact that he had betrayed her to Penelope.

Nevertheless she said, after greeting him:

"One might say that you are frightened of me."

"I—frightened? I am always in awe of you, Anna Sofia. But as for being frightened in precisely the manner you seem to convey—"

"Well, never mind. You needn't be frightened. How are things with Miss Hale? She seemed last night at the Capuchins quite content to be with you?"

"I think I can say without too much conceit that I am interesting her. I am, at any rate, doing my best."

"And your best is no small achievement. You should write yourself next into a play—'The Great Lover.' Could you not make a stirring drama of yourself? The man, for example, who can make women love him at his will—worth-while women, too—playing them off the one against the other, until at last he plays once too often—"

"Your imagination is excessively active to-night, Anna Sofia," he broke in uncomfortably.

"Too active, perhaps. I must confine myself to facts, for I have not much time to give to you. My work here is almost done, Oscar. I have seen Creighton. He is ruined. Gebrueder Salomon have done their part. I am paying my fortune for it, but—"

"Is it costing you so much?"

"Practically all that Ronai left me. But then, that is why I married Ronai. I shall have a little money left when I am through with him—enough to return to Europe, and buy for myself, perhaps, a little vineyard above the Danube, perhaps a little cottage in Nice, and there live out my allotted years in peace—in the peace that I know must be mine. But I must be in at the finish. I must see him an utterly ruined and broken man. You will help me the rest of the way, will you not, Oscar?"

"Yes; but you appall me, somehow. Your voice, your manner, signify to me something—something Greek, I might

say, in its tragedy. And you propose to work the rest of his ruin through—Miss Hale?"

"And do you protest if I do intend just that?" she asked him sharply.

"I think you should have some mercy. When you play with human hearts——"

She broke in passionately:

"How can I ever know mercy? Did he know mercy?"

"I think you should at least try to know it, Anna Sofia."

"Are you talking for me, or for yourself, or for Miss Hale?"

"For yourself, I think."

"For Miss Hale, I think."

"Is it not enough, after all, to have ruined him financially?"

Anna Sofia looked long at him.

"You would advise me to go no further with it?"

Zoltan jumped eagerly at her first sign, or so he thought, of listening to him.

"Yes!"

"Do you think she would show me mercy for what I have done, if I stop now? Could you urge her to it?"

"She—show you mercy? How?"

"She—you may not know this, Zoltan—she suspects my part in the robbery of Creighton's safe, and has threatened to tell the police what she surmises. That is why I am leaving the city. I dare not take chances with her."

"But perhaps I can persuade her to be lenient."

"Perhaps! You might try! Nevertheless, I am going away, into seclusion, for a rest, and to think it over. It may be that I shall stop with having done this much. You might tell her that. Perhaps you can get her to listen to you. Zoltan, listen to me. Is it possible that, if I should offer to help save Creighton's standing now, before he is irrevocably ruined, she might forget what she thinks of me."

"That is very possible. Should I suggest it to her?"

"No, not yet. I shall think it over while I am in seclusion, and write to you directly about it. I may ask her to come to me, wherever I may be, to discuss the matter. You would bring her to me, would you not, Zoltan, and make sure that she is not leading the police to me?"

"Yes, of course; she is a just and fair-minded woman."

"Let us leave it at that, then, for the present. You will probably have a letter about it from me later. Now, one more request I have to make of you. I must warn Horthy to look out for her. I want to do that myself, and thank him for what he managed to do for me. I must do it before I leave the city, for I may not return here. Can you find him for me at once—before dinner?"

"Yes; I think I can get him on the telephone. Do you want him to come here—to you?" He expressed doubt of that.

"Yes; it is the last time. Let him come here to me."

Zoltan was not long in finding the man he sought, and over the telephone summoned him at once to Anna Sofia. She dismissed Zoltan after that.

In the interval before his coming, she set her maid to packing certain essentials for her journey, and ordered her car to be made ready for an immediate and long trip out of town.

Horthy arrived speedily—a red-bearded, gangling man of an obviously high order of intelligence, and of a social standing correspondingly low. He was awkward in his very deference to her, and could not put himself at ease in spite of her best efforts to that end.

"I have asked you to come because I think you are a loyal friend of mine, and because you know that I am a loyal friend and supporter of your Hungarian organization."

"No one could be more loyal to you, madame; and I am sure that our bund has no more loyal supporter than you."

"Whereas Zoltan—Oscar Zoltan, on the contrary, has proven to be a traitor both to you and to me."

"Impossible!"

"A fact, nevertheless." She told him briefly in what respect. "However," she went on, "there is no immediate danger to you or to the men whom you provided to accomplish my desires in the matter of Mr. Creighton's safe. It is I alone who have anything to fear. And to escape that danger I am leaving the city to-night. I have much more business for you to have done for me. In return for its successful accomplishment, I will make over to your organization the entire amount which you recovered from Mr. Creighton's safe."

"Madame, you are incredibly generous."

"From motives of patriotism, mainly," she said, knowing well how to make the strongest appeal to him. "I know of no organization abler than yours to restore peace and tranquillity to our country. And so I give the sum gladly. These favors I ask of you are, perhaps, no more than personal favors. I come to you because you seem to be able to manage such affairs through your wide acquaintance."

"Thank you, madame."

"As you may have guessed," she continued, "I am in some respects a desperate woman. Still, you have never demanded explanations, so I shall not waste my time in giving them to you. Zoltan told me that a friend of yours has a house, or a cottage, somewhere along the Jersey coast, and that he possesses a fast launch which makes trips out to the fleet of vessels off shore, which brings contraband goods to this country."

"Yes, that is true."

"It occurs to me that a person—I, for example—might leave this country suddenly and secretly by that means, provided I have money enough to charter the vessel."

"That is quite possible."

"Could your friend arrange all that for me? And would your friend put me up in his house for a few days while certain other arrangements are being completed?"

"I am sure of it. He would do anything I ask him to."

"Then will you arrange it at once? I want to go there to-night. Will you send some one to me to act as guide for my chauffeur?"

"I will go myself, now, and arrange everything."

"Excellent, except for one thing."

"And what is that?"

"I have something more for you to do. I want Zoltan killed."

"Madame!"

"But he has betrayed me, and your society, has he not? Has he not deserved some penalty?"

"But the danger of murder——"

"It is done every day here, I understand. Besides, I want it done in a peculiar manner that will throw the guilt on another person. On this American, Creighton, to be exact. He is very jealous of Zoltan's being so much with Miss Hale, the actress. All this has been well established in the social set of both of them. He has followed them in their public appearances together. The man Slidell, whom I believe you know slightly, knows quite well Creighton's jealousy. I propose to have Zoltan bring Miss Hale down to that cottage where I shall be staying. I propose to bring Creighton there at the same time. Zoltan will be shot. There will be witnesses enough to establish the fact that Creighton did it. Do you see? Is it not a clear case, a simple one, provided only you furnish men to do it? And in return for all this I shall make over to your patriotic organization that entire amount of French bonds. Remember, please, that Zoltan deserves his punishment, because he has betrayed both you and me. A Magyar betraying

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his own countrymen! Can you imagine it? What do you think of it? Is it not necessary to punish him? And this punishment which I suggest—is it not possible and safe?"

Horthy was abashed before her audacity and recklessness, but was swept along on the dark torrent of her will.

"Yes, madame, I think so," he said, and appeared scarcely conscious of what he had said.

"And so I am sure you will arrange it. That is, if you can. And with your wide acquaintance, I am sure that you can arrange it."

"I think so."

"Then I am to assume that you accept my offer?"

"I think so."

"How long would it take you to make your plans?"

"When would you want it done?"

"As soon as possible. I have delayed completing my own plans—that is, the arranging for Creighton to meet Zoltan and Miss Hale at that cottage—that I have delayed purposely until you can find your men. But I should like to finish it all as soon as possible."

He hesitated.

"Give me but to-night. I know some men——"

"But I must leave New York to-night. I dare not stay until to-morrow morning."

"I could send you with a friend of mine to guide your chauffeur down into Jersey."

"Good enough!" she said. "And I shall see you at the cottage to-morrow."

And thus it was that Anna Sofia completed her plots for Creighton's undoing. Thus the long, long arm of vengeance, which for years she had been extending out to him, and subtly around him, folded itself about him to crush and destroy him utterly.

The man Horthy went his way, and Anna Sofia set happily about her preparations for the journey.

CHAPTER X.

An hour later a big limousine departed from the Regent, carrying on the outside meager luggage, the chauffeur, and a man whom Horthy had sent as guide; and in the inside Anna Sofia, looking very tiny and very lovely, wrapped about in billowing folds of rugs and robes, her gloved hands, as always, buried in the fur of the white wolfhound on the seat beside her.

The turbulent snow squalls of the afternoon had ceased as night fell. Over the Jersey marshes there was no moon, but through air never so clear and cold and still came starlight which, reflected by the white blanket of snow, made night into day. In the open reaches of the country, the sky seemed never so serene nor so intense, never more vast, more fathomless. In her exaltation of triumph, Anna Sofia found herself, alone with her borzoi, on dim pinnacles that were near neighbors of the stars.

With the heavy car and the icy roads and the excess of traffic of the early evening, they could make but little speed until they left Elizabeth. After that the roads were more deserted. Only occasionally did they get the flicker of a tail lamp ahead, and only occasionally was the limousine flooded through the back window by headlights of approaching cars.

Ten minutes out of Elizabeth, one bore down on them with peremptory signals for room to pass, even before the headlights flooded Anna Sofia's blond head. The chauffeur drew the limousine promptly to one side of the road. The onrushing car sped past them, a low, long roadster, single top up and curtains on, concealing all hint of its occupants, even if Anna Sofia had been interested enough to search them out.

She saw the tail light fade almost instantly into the darkness beyond. Whoever drove at that speed must either be on business of importance, or mad.

And yet she picked the light up again. It was maneuvering in the road beyond, turning round upon its tracks. They were almost on it, slowing down to permit the roadster to complete the turn, before the headlights flashed upon her from in front. Then Anna Sofia felt her own car halted suddenly to avoid collision. For the roadster, coming back toward them, was swung abruptly across the road to bar all passage, and there brought to a stop.

Out of the roadster stepped Creighton. His right hand was diving into the pocket of his greatcoat. He came quickly toward them.

"I want to speak with your mistress," she heard him tell the chauffeur. "She knows me."

Anna Sofia gasped the first words that came to her lips:

"Drive on," she said, only praying that the chauffeur could hear her.

Now Creighton brought from his pocket a great service revolver, and showed it to the chauffeur and his companion in the driver's seat.

"I am the boss of this party," she heard him say again. "Let there be no interference by either of you." Then, as if he had completely destroyed them, he overlooked them and came to wrench open the door of the limousine.

"Rather a surprise to you, I have no doubt, Madame Ronai, but you are coming back with me, in my car. Please get out and come with me. I shall carry your robes. You will need them. And have your man transfer the most necessary of your luggage to my car. You and I may be gone for a longish time. I don't want to put you to too much hardship."

"Why, this is—this is—" stammered Anna Sofia.

"I know it is. Call it what you will. We are fighting one another with your weapons now. Will you get out and come with me, or shall I carry you?"

"I shall call the police."

"I suspect so. Give me your robes. If your dog attempts to bite me, I shall choke it with my bare hands."

For the dog was growling at his intrusion. That threat evoked from Anna Sofia her first sign of fear, her first indication of anything but defiance.

"Babushka," she whispered, and instantly the dog was at peace.

The man whom Horthy had sent jumped from the seat and approached Creighton. Creighton covered him with his revolver, and the man slunk back.

"The next threat by either of you, and I will shoot at sight. One of you transfer Madame Ronai's luggage to my car."

"Madame—" the chauffeur queried.

"Can't you men do something with this renegade?" Anna Sofia cried with more shrillness than her exquisite voice had ever created.

"They will do nothing, madame," Creighton said very calmly, "except transfer your baggage, or such of it as you wish to take with you. Give them orders to that effect."

Creighton actually waited a tense moment without stirring a muscle. Presently Anna Sofia, in a very small voice, gave her commands, as Creighton had bidden her.

"Thanks very much," Creighton commended her. "Now, if you will give me your robes, and come with me—"

"May I take Babushka?"

Creighton hesitated a moment.

"Yes. You will need him, perhaps, as a friend. Hurry, please. There is a lot of traffic on this road, and I don't want to risk being questioned."

He piled the robes on his arm, held out his hand to assist her in dismounting, and guided her along the slippery road to his waiting car. Just before she climbed into it, she turned and spoke in her own language to the astounded men who stood apart, watching.

"What did you tell them?" Creighton demanded.

"What did I tell them? To inform the police all the way back into New York," she cried with defiance.

"Naturally. They probably would have done it in any case," Creighton said, after a moment's hesitation.

Then he helped her into his own car, wrapped her tenderly and carefully in her robes, disposed the borzoi at her feet with an extra rug wrapped about it, gave a warning to the two men left there that they were not to disturb him, and started back toward New York.

"And what," she asked after a moment or two, and in a completely amiable voice, "is this all about? What do you propose doing?"

"We decided to fight it openly, did we not?" Creighton returned lightly.

"Yes."

"But since your weapons are so much more powerful than mine, and so mysterious, I have decided to make it a defensive battle on my part, and to fight it out where I can control the choice of weapons. Does all that mean anything to you?"

Her answer was a long time coming, and rather low toned when it came.

"Not very much, I am afraid."

"You'll not be kept in ignorance very long. In the first place, I must know what the fight is all about. I don't yet know even the *casus belli*."

"Why should you know? Why must I tell you if I don't choose to?"

Creighton laughed shortly.

"Subtle addition to torture, eh? Not knowing why you do it? Well, never mind now. You will have told me before you and I are finished. Also, you will leave me and my interests alone. Also, I am very much inclined to think that I shall still be able to save myself. All this may be a comforting thought for you to ruminate on during this long night's ride."

"A long night's ride?"

"Yes. To an old, deserted farmhouse I happen to own, up in the Catskills

back of West Point, where Rip van Winkle slept for twenty years. Just that much deserted. And a long night's ride to reach it, with the roads as they are."

"And what are you going to do with me there?"

"Stay there with you to control what you do, to watch you until you have come to your senses, and have conceived some idea of what justice and fairness are in this country. How do you think you will like it—cooking for me up there, and waiting on me generally, while I have the long rest I need?"

A long time after that she was silent.

"What would Miss Hale say to that?"

"Have you not yourself so worked it out that Miss Hale cares but little what I do? Have you not planned for that very thing?"

Again a long silence.

"You will never get me to that place. I shall cry out to the police at every town we pass."

"The New York police would be very glad if you did."

For a long time after that they were silent. Creighton pushed the car on through Elizabeth with small regard for traffic regulations, and roared out upon the road to Newark with even less regard for safety. Anna Sofia gave no sign of fear, however, at his dangerously skidding corners. She sat very still, very small, bundled in her robes, thinking hard, stroking the dog now and then.

"How long should it take us to get there?" she asked.

"At this rate, barring accidents and snowdrifts in the mountains, about four hours. It may be dawn before we arrive; one can never tell."

"And how long do you intend to keep me there?"

"A day, a month, a year. Who knows? I have no reason to come back to life under the circumstances; and, since you have put me in this frame of

mind, I think you should share life with me. Unless you care to change the circumstances. We shall see about that."

"How can I change the circumstances?"

"You think you might want to?"

Creighton asked, with his first show of real interest in her.

"No, not particularly. I am merely curious."

Now it was Creighton's turn to think.

"I may as well tell you, then, what I have done. I took a long chance—perhaps even an unfair chance; but you do not appear to have set any rules of fairness in this little game of ours."

"What have you done?"

"I have cabled Gebrueder Salomon of Frankfort in your name—signing your name to the cablegram, that is—asking them to verify rumors you have heard, saying that they are offering to buy, on your account, all foreign holdings of C. & S. C. stock."

"You mean, you have made them think that my cabled orders to them to buy were without my authority?"

"Yes! It was my only chance. They will not proceed now without having further advices direct from you. They will cable you at the Hotel Regent, and you will not be there to reply to their cablegram—not for a day, nor a week, nor a year, if need be, until you are willing to rescind your orders to them. And meantime you will be my housekeeper—"

"I will die before I will be a servant to you."

"If that is your choice, I shan't argue against it—now, at least."

"You have the ingenuity of the devil."

Creighton laughed rather delightfully.

"What, then, must you say of your own ingenuity?"

"I tell you, I should die if you forced me to be your drudge."

"Then Gebrueder Salomon's inquiry will never be answered," was Creighton's only comment.

For a full half hour they drove along in silence now, with only the rushing of the wind and the whistle of tires on the frosty road to remind them that they were on this mad adventure.

"I shall probably kill you before two days are done," Anna Sofia said suddenly.

"I shall look out for that, madame."

"Yes, but you don't know me, nor the intense and desperate hatred I have for you, and have had for you since you condemned my husband to death. Since then my life—"

"Since I did what?"

"Condemned my husband to death on the charge of being a spy, when he was actually on the most patriotic service for his country. My life went out with his. Since then I have known not a second of peace, nor shall I ever know peace until I have evened scores and avenged him. Why should I not kill you? There is no peace for me otherwise."

Creighton's mood was radically changed before that sudden outburst of passion.

"Madame, I do not understand."

"You sat in trial upon my husband, who was charged with espionage. You condemned him to death in spite of his pleas for clemency. He was executed the next morning—"

"What was his name?"

"Ladislav Horalvy."

"Ah, yes! I have nothing to say. I did my duty."

"As he did his. And as he paid, so you shall pay." Her voice was no longer charged with passion, as it had been at her first outburst; rather she had become very clear, almost subdued in her speech. "All my life since then I have lived only to make you pay. And when I shall have made you pay I am through with life. Otherwise I must have died when he died. I loved him with a love that you are unable to conceive. But for your inability to

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conceive what all this means, what manner of woman I am, how little anything else matters—but for your blind ignorance of all these things, you would drop me here in the middle of the road, and flee from me for your life, as a man flees from a poisonous snake that carries death at a stroke. You do not know, my friend, what you are playing with."

"Madame, I am very sorry. Of course I did not know all this. But knowing it does not change my resolution. We shall do as I have planned. And I may tell you that now, at least, I have a full conception of the danger of the game I am playing."

"And you are going on with it?"

"Yes, I am!"

"Fool that you are!"

Creighton made no reply. They went on and on, endlessly into the night, endlessly into a horizon of black, star-dotted sky. A pale, late moon came up toward midnight, and hid itself as if for warmth against the winter night, behind a veil of fleecy clouds. It revealed shadowy masses of hills, rising into mountains, toward which the car pushed on with added eagerness, it seemed, now that the goal was in sight.

"An hour more, I think," Creighton said, his lips stiff with cold. "Stiffish and slow going from here on. The snow is deeper, and we have some dirt road through forest."

"I shall be frozen. It is as well."

"Are you really very cold?"

"Would you mind if I were?"

That surprised Creighton.

"Yes. But I think the heat from the engine, and from the dog——"

"Would it disturb your driving if I sat closer to you?"

"No! I've been thinking—I must mention one thing to you. Have you any weapons concealed about you—a pistol, a dagger? I am serious about it."

"No." She drew back from him now.

"I do not like the way you answer. I shall have to search you when we stop, and before I sleep. I regret it, but it is necessary for my safety."

"As if I cared! You are no more to me than a dog—not so much."

Half an hour more and they entered what seemed to be an interminable forest, dotted here and there along the narrow road with clearings where summer cabins stood. They were climbing now all the time, with much rumbling of gears as Creighton had to shift to make steep grades in the deep snow. For at least five miles they crawled along in this fashion, seeing no sign of human habitation save those deserted summer camps in the heart of the forest.

They came out into an open, cleared plateau, in the full light of the moon, on an elevation that appeared to be the very top of the mountain. The road swept to the right. Creighton drove the car in between stone pillars that sprang up suddenly at the side of the road, and came to a stop before an old stone house of apparently colonial origin, hemmed about with the gloom of giant pines.

"Is this the place?" Anna Sofia asked with a shudder.

"Yes. You had better stay here in the car, in your robes, until I build a fire. There has been no one in the place for a year, as far as I know."

He took care to remove the switch key from the car as he left it, walked stiffly across the creaking porch, and disappeared within. Anna Sofia saw, coming from the windows of the small wing on the south, a feeble yellow glare, which she guessed was candle flare, or perhaps the light from a kerosene lamp. Again she shuddered. She heard him moving about briskly. Then ruddy flames lighted the small, barred windows, which urged her fancy to hear the crackle of hungry flames in the fireplace. After that he dragged heavy furniture about, and seemed to be tramping through the house from top to

bottom and from end to end. Ten minutes elapsed before he came to her.

"You are to be congratulated," he told her. "Everything is in better condition than I had dared hope. There have been no marauders."

"Shall I come with you now?"

"Yes. It is warm now close by the fireplace." He took Babushka's leash, piled the rugs over his arm, and said: "You had best wait here until I take these in. I shall come back and carry you in through the snow. Rather dangerous to get your feet frostbitten."

He was gone but a moment; returned. She surrendered her slight weight to him without a word, and without a word he carried her through the deep snow to the hall, where he let her down.

At the right of the hall, in the room where the fire was, she saw low-beamed ceilings, heavy furniture, fishing rods, hunting trophies, all converted already into an atmosphere of comfort by the ruddy flames that chased the shadows to far corners and left them hovering there. Rather unsteadily she walked to the high-backed settee that he had drawn up in front of the fire, and on which he had thrown the rugs. He walked beside her, and threw a huge, gnarled stump upon the blaze.

She spoke to him before he turned back to her.

"The matter of my carrying concealed weapons——"

"Yes?"

She caressed the dog, which came and stood beside her.

"I've been thinking," she said. "I have weapons—a Derringer, a small penknife—nothing else, I think."

He looked at her with surprise and gratitude.

"Thanks! Nothing else?"

"Nothing. Here! They are both in my bag. Take it."

He took the bag, looked it through, and picked out from its contents what she had described to him.

"And you take my word," she said, almost as if she could not believe it, "that I have no more weapons concealed?"

He scanned her closely.

"Yes," he said.

She watched him until he was embarrassed under her scrutiny and turned again to poke the fire.

"You are a strange man," she said finally.

He changed the subject.

"I suggest that you sleep here in your rugs to-night, on that settee, if you can. I shall sit up and watch the fire. Tomorrow we shall build fires throughout the house and get the whole building warm. Then it will not be so hard for you, and I can sleep."

"And how long do you propose to stay here with me like this?"

"Until you cable your bankers in Frankfort, canceling your buying orders—or the rest of our lives."

CHAPTER XI.

During the next few days the strange ménage went on amiably enough; a silent household, but a household without friction. Rousing fires which Creighton built in every room made the house comfortable. He had mercy enough on Anna Sofia, upon seeing her complete ineffectualness at cooking, to prepare meals himself. She, however, without protest washed the dishes and kept the house clean.

When she was not busy with these slight household tasks, she kept herself for the most part in the privacy of the suite which Creighton had set aside for her, where she passed the time reading books from Creighton's library, or playing with Babushka, or thinking.

Creighton spent his days roaming the mountain, shooting game, arranging for food and fuel supplies to be delivered regularly from the village below. Evenings he sat alone in the living room,

reading until drowsiness, superinduced by his outdoor life, sent him early to bed.

On the third or fourth day a blizzard kept him indoors. Rather late in the afternoon, Anna Sofia came to him in the living room.

"I was thinking," she said, almost shyly, "that we might have tea together."

"You are very lonely, I suppose. Nothing would suit me better."

Anna Sofia worked long and noisily in the kitchen, and finally brought in a tray of tea things.

"I really can't stand this, you know," she complained. "The work and the solitude—how much longer——"

"If you don't mind, please don't ask that question. It has already been answered."

"But answered with a deadlock, a stalemate."

"So let it be."

"You are intolerable, really," she told him, but there was no rancor in her voice; rather it sounded an unimpassioned complaint against that over which she had no control.

"You have only to inform your bankers, you know——"

"Will you read to me after tea? Perhaps if I were not so much alone——"

"Yes, I'll read, if you like. What shall it be? I brought up a copy of Zoltan's published plays."

"Oh, heavens, no! I think I saw Sterne there—'The Sentimental Journey.' Is it good? I have heard of him, but never read him."

"Delightful."

Creighton lighted a cigarette and got the book. Anna Sofia snuggled down in the rugs on the old, high-backed settee, caressed the borzoi's head, and now and then watched Creighton as he read slowly to her from his huge, deep chair by the fire.

"You are an amazing man," she broke out suddenly, while he was in the mid-

dle of a sentence. "What are you doing to me? I am getting so that I don't know myself."

Creighton glanced at her, made no reply, and went on reading.

Again she interrupted.

"I should be making designs to kill you, and here I sit in perfect content, listening——"

"Are you tired of my reading?"

"I've hated you and hated you for years, without knowing you."

"Shall I go on reading?"

She jumped up abruptly.

"No, I have had enough of it. Let me take the book. How far did you read?"

He showed her. She almost snatched the book from him, called Babushka after her, and ran to her own quarters.

He saw nothing of her until he came in, next morning, from his sturdy plowing through the snow left by the blizzard. He found her then sitting on the settee, in front of a fire smoldering rather low because of lack of fuel. She looked at him without speaking until he had nursed the fire to a blaze, and looked round at her.

"I had hoped to find you here," she said. "I wanted you to read to me again. I can't read alone. Your voice makes me forget things."

And again he read for an hour. Again she watched him from time to time, and interrupted him with fragments of speech that had no connection with his reading nor, indeed, with one another.

Then, suddenly, she burst out with: "Stop reading. Don't read any more. Never again to me!"

"As you will," he said calmly, and closed the book.

"You are maddening," she cried passionately.

"I did it only because you asked me to, and because you were lonely," he said, looking at her without interest.

"You are maddening, I tell you," she

cried again, and sat up straight to face him. "I have hated you so long, so long——"

"This bids fair to be our daily conversation," Creighton remarked grimly.

"And you—you, whom I hate and detest, are making me fall in love with you!"

Creighton started to pass off her speech with the slight laugh he thought it deserved; but the laugh died on his lips as he looked at her.

"Is this your plot against me—to bring me up here and make me love you?"

Creighton was puzzled. He studied her long as she stood by the settee, one hand resting in the long, carved arm of it, looking at him as he had never before seen woman look. The play of the firelight on her lovely features made her somehow almost uncanny to look upon.

"Is this a trick?" he said at last, and earnestly enough.

"Can you believe it is a trick? And I have hated you so long!" Her voice seemed to come from some immeasurable distance.

Creighton could not fail to believe her now. He turned his back on her, and started to walk toward the door.

"You had better go to your own rooms, and stay there," he said.

He looked back at her over his shoulder.

"Yes, I will," she said. "You have shamed me enough."

"Please don't say that. But——"

She broke in.

"Yes, it is true."

She left him then, and went through the hall to her own side of the house. Creighton did not see her again before lunch. After lunch he rather noisily left the house and went for a tramp again, further afield, this time, scrambling in wide circles through the forest until, well toward dusk, he came out upon the road that led up to the house.

Now he heard the sound of sleigh bells ahead of him, bells jingling to the monotonous rhythm of plodding, weary horses.

The sound electrified him. No house but his own lay above that spot on the road. No one would be climbing farther up the hill save some one bound for his house. No goods had been ordered for delivery that day. To Creighton, the sounds could mean but one thing: that his retreat, which he had so fondly thought was secure throughout the duration of the winter, if he cared to have it so, had been discovered already and invaded.

He hurried on, able to make more speed than the horses because they had to break out the road which he followed. He overtook the visitors almost at the very edge of the clearing. A cutter and team hired from the village livery stable, of course; the driver; a woman beside him. Penelope Hale! No earthly doubt of it! He hallooed at them and ran on. The driver stopped. Penelope turned to face him just as he panted up to them.

"Of all perilous adventures, Penelope!"

"Vance Creighton, why have you done this mad thing?"

"Why did you come here?"

"To find you. To know the truth. I had to, Vance. I have looked and looked and thought and wondered and feared—why did you do it? Why did you not let me know?"

For the first time the thought of Anna Sofia came into his mind.

"I couldn't. It was my only chance."

"Have you run away from something? No, you haven't, of course. I can't understand."

"Come on into the house and get warm," Creighton bade her. "I will tell you about it."

He walked along beside her the rest of the way to the porch. She told him briefly of things in New York; that

Zoltan informed her that Anna Sofia had got safely out of the country on her way back to seclusion in Europe; that Zoltan, fearing for himself, had left on Saturday's boat; and that she had exhausted all sources of information concerning himself until she chanced to remember his little camp here and had come up at once as far as the railroad would bring her, at which point she had information that he was in fact having supplies sent up to the house. Thereupon she had come higher without delay.

Creighton realized that it was not possible for Penelope to return to the village that night. Darkness was in the valleys, and was quickly creeping up to the mountaintop. Snow flurries rode on a north wind, bodeful of another blizzard at hand. The cold had become intense as the pale sun sank. It was not safe to send man or beast abroad on such a night.

Creighton sent the driver on to the stables with the horses, and took Penelope into the living room. He had much misgiving about what Anna Sofia might do, but knew there was no dodging the situation.

As they approached the fire, Creighton once more found Anna Sofia in that deep settee in front of his fire. There was no time for explanation to Penelope. Anna Sofia sat up at their approach, but saw only Penelope. One could guess that in her glance she read all truths. Then she smiled—a curious little smile.

"So you found us, after all, in our little retreat," she said.

Penelope, thus confronted, looked at Creighton more than at Anna Sofia. Creighton said:

"I have not yet had time to explain——"

Penelope said matter-of-factly:

"And I am very glad to have found you."

"One would think," Anna Sofia de-

clared, "that you would have had more pride than to come here like this."

Penelope returned:

"Let there be no more suggestions of this nature so long as I am here, if you don't mind."

Anna Sofia defied Penelope with an exchange of glances. Then her slight frame was suddenly shaken by a tempest.

"You have no right to shame me so!" she cried, out of abysses of spiritual depression. "It is more than I can endure. I—shamed and shamed, and yet—I love him more than you can love him, more than you can ever know how to love him!"

Creighton spoke gently to her:

"I think perhaps it would be better for you, madame, to go to your rooms."

With that she ran to him and threw herself at his feet, a pitiable and abject creature.

"Don't send me away!" she sobbed with dry eyes. "I must die if you send me away."

Creighton leaned over her, and raised her to her feet in front of him.

"I am very sorry. I had no share in all this. You must go to your rooms."

"I beg of you——"

"It would be useless of you to beg, madame. Must I carry you away to your rooms?"

After a time she nodded quite simply. She leaned heavily on Creighton's arm. He helped her across the hall and to the wing he had assigned to her. He looked to her fire, and to the supply of rugs on the sofa in front of it, where the borzoi lay. Then he went back to Penelope.

They two had dinner in the living room, talking in low tones of many things, and perhaps chiefly of Anna Sofia. Penelope took food to her, and reported that she was still sitting by the fire, and refusing to talk.

After that they knew no more of her. They sat and read, or talked oc-

asionally, or were silent over long periods, while the north wind rocked the house and drew the fire up the chimney in roaring flames.

Long after midnight Creighton heard a faint scratching and whining through the house. They listened.

"It is the wolfhound," Penelope said. "Perhaps Anna Sofia is in trouble."

"Will you go to her room and see?" Creighton suggested.

Penelope started through the hall, but turned back.

"The dog is outdoors, not in," she said. "He is scratching at the front door."

Creighton went to open the door. The dog bounded in, dragging the fine-spun, silver leash. Creighton closed the door against the howling wind. The dog shook its silky hair free of snow, and bounded back to the door. Almost he seemed to speak.

Penelope's eyes met Creighton's over the graceful form of the borzoi, whining now to get out again.

"That," said Penelope, "can mean but one thing on a night like this."

"It's impossible! I didn't hear her go out. Did you?"

"No. But the roaring of the fire, and our talking—and if she intended to go out she would have gone very quietly."

"Look in her room."

They went together. Anna Sofia was not there. She had extinguished the lamp, and the fire chased taunting shadows about the wall.

"The woman must have been mad!" Creighton exclaimed. "I must go—"

"Not altogether mad, I think," Penelope said. "Perhaps it would be more merciful to leave her—"

"You cannot mean that, Penelope. She cannot have gone far on a night like this."

Creighton caught his greatcoat from its hook in the hall, and drew on cap and gloves. The borzoi leaped beside him to the door.

Penelope ran to him now.

"No, Vance! I can't bear to have you go out now. It is hopeless, a night like this. And there is no telling how long she has been gone. It is sure to be too late. And it would be more merciful to her to leave her—"

"Keep the fires well up, Penelope."

He and the borzoi were gone before she could remonstrate further. Followed an interminable period of waiting. Her watch seemed to be standing still. An age was represented in that less than an hour before she heard his heavy footsteps on the porch outside. Penelope reached the door as soon as he, and opened it to him. He stumbled past her.

Anna Sofia was in his arms. She wore no coat, only the thin gown she had had on when last they saw her, when Creighton had led her from the room. The borzoi walked beside them in stately dignity.

"The dog took me straight to her, of course," Creighton said. "Half a mile, perhaps, but off the road." He carried her in to the high-backed settee before his own fire, and wrapped her about with rugs.

Penelope watched, unable to do anything.

"Is she—"

Creighton got whisky for Anna Sofia, so that she opened her eyes for a moment.

"No, she is not gone," Creighton whispered to Penelope. "She could speak when I found her. She tried to make the village."

"But without a cloak?" Penelope asked.

"No. When she got lost she threw away her cloak, she said, so that death might come more quickly. I couldn't find it—drifted over, I suppose."

"Is there a way to get a doctor?" Penelope asked.

"I'm afraid not, to-night. We must do what we can."

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He gave Anna Sofia more stimulant. She opened her eyes again, and spoke with difficulty:

"I heard—what you've been saying. No doctor—it is too late. My lungs—and I want to die. Pride and shame—and hate and love—their warfare within

me—has beaten me. 'Vengeance is mine, saith the Lord.'"

She reached for Creighton's hand, and closed her eyes again. And like that they all three sat there until day-break, scarcely knowing when her spirit passed, so eager was its going.

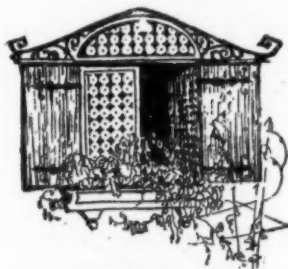


AS LOVE WAKES

THERE is a smell of burning in the air;
The last year's leaves turn crimson in brief passion;
The April gusts are heavy as they bear
The thin, blue smoke, and make green morning ashen.
New leaves even now burn to a deeper green;
Houses and homeless hills in grim decay
Are charring, crumbling, in the slow and keen
Smolder that quickens all things in their day.

The earth burns coldly toward another moon,
And every sun is a swift and laughing pyre.
And you, whose ear is leaning to this tune,
You cannot freeze, unmoved by time's sweet fire;
And I, whose heart is flame and laughter too,
Can only blossom in sweet fire toward you.

CLEMENT WOOD.



SONG

I SHALL be glad howe'er life goes
While there is twilight and the rose,
Bird song and golden fields of wheat,
Aprils, and children on the street.
I shall rejoice that life runs on
While there are stars to wish upon,
Rainbows and sunsets, singing frogs
In marshy places, forests, dogs
Barking and wagging welcome, dew
On morning gossamer—and you!

JOHN HANLON.



Perfumes

By Beatrice Ravenel

Author of "The Elimination of Fernando,"
"Marriage for a Year," etc.

IT was not conscious cleverness on Rita's part, Ridgway decided, that had made her just the type that Paris was admiring. Fresh from his two-year sojourn there, where he had been attached to the American embassy, he was qualified to judge. It was only an instinct in Rita, a sort of happy destiny, which brought her always on the crest of the wave, just where and what she should be. If she had been born in a harem, she would have become favorite sultana, and, if she had been born a Paris washerwoman, she would inevitably have been crowned queen at the annual fête. She was intended to be the choicest of her kind.

He wondered now, as he looked at her—at the supple figure lounging on the sofa, one arm hitched gracefully over the back; at the nervous, intelligent hands, at the face that was so cunningly modeled to express feeling and avoid insipidity; at the bistro shadows that so set off the clear amber tones of her skin—wondered how much truth there was in the half-forgotten story that credited some Slav blood to her family. That old tale had been in the nature of a scandal. It concerned the beautiful wife of an American merchant prince, who had for some years lived in a villa near Budapest, and a personage of such high position that it was better not to mention him at all. Who knew?

At all events, this semioriental flavor was the rage in Paris, and he had returned to New York, on a visit, to find it flourishing in the Seymour's drawing-room. Rita must always have had the makings of it, but, though they had known each other from childhood, he had not noticed it before. She had kept it in abeyance until it became desirable.

He had spent a most agreeable afternoon. First he had had numberless questions to answer. Rita, who had gone to the fashionable convent school of the Assumption, wanted the last news about every one of her friends, most of whom seemed to have married counts or marquises. Also, what had become of old Madame de Trailles, with whom she had spent her holidays? Ridgway had called on her, she knew.

After her curiosity had been satisfied she had helped him to pick up the American threads which had slipped out of his memory. She informed him who had gone away and who had bought on Long Island; who was dead or dropped; who had married and, quite as important, who had divorced. One was apt to make stupid mistakes, uninstructed. Rita possessed the narrative style, stripped of superfluities. She gave you the high spots, the crucial touches, without sentiment, yet without too much malice. As women went she was, he decided, pretty truthful, chiefly from an arrogance that declined to

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handle that dangerous explosive, the truth, with proper precaution.

"And the old set?" he inquired. "About the same?"

She gave her musical laugh, like a muffled gong.

"About, except for what I've told you. And—one new ingredient that doesn't mix."

"New? I thought you never let any one new in. It's the closest corporation I ever met. Perfectly self-contained and self-satisfied."

"Do you remember the Staffords who used to live next door to us, years ago? We all went to children's parties together. Margie."

"I think I do. Didn't you have a fight with her once, in the middle of the floor? Accused her of grabbing your partner, wasn't it?"

"You were the partner."

"She cried, and when I expressed myself as willing to accept either one of you—I must have had perfect manners in those days—you kicked me. Those are the sweet memories of childhood one never forgets."

"You have perfect manners still, Glyn. That comes from living abroad. Anything goes here now, you know."

"Old Stafford went West and made an everlasting fortune in oil—or was it mines? Mines! That's more correct than oil. What became of them?"

"Nothing." A wicked smile tilted her mouth. "Yes, I couldn't express it more vividly than that. Simply nothing. They're that kind of people. Old Mr. Stafford died out there, and the son is running a ranch de luxe, I believe, in Arizona. And Mrs. Stafford and Margie——"

"Well?" he asked, as she paused. "I bite."

"Have come home and are doing their most violent to get into what you call our closed corporation." As she saw his appreciation of the humors of the situation, the gong released a long, clear

note. "It's delicious. The old lady seems to feel that she's got an hereditary claim on us because she and mamma used to be friends. You know they're the simplest kind of people. They're folks! Perfectly presentable, and well enough connected, and only too anxious to hold up their end and do what's expected. It takes all our time side-stepping Mrs. Stafford's parties. But—well, she was born too late. She belongs to that good old era when men were men and women perfect ladies. She kisses mamma, and she would kiss me, if I hadn't once pointedly taken out a lip-stick, to give her a hint that women don't kiss any longer—each other, anyway."

"And Margie?" he asked. "Does she kiss?"

A sort of veil dropped over Rita's expression.

"She's quite otherwise. Mother does the work. Margie just falls in. The only obvious trouble with her is that—simply she doesn't fit. You can't take a crowd like ours that has fused together and understands without explanations, and throw a sweet, simple child into it, and have things comfortable."

"You let me in."

"Oh, you!" The tone was flattery of the genuine variety. "You're something we could do with a bit more of. But Margie hasn't anything to her. The proof is she hasn't even picked up a man yet. She doesn't amount to anything."

He smiled with a raillery that took the sting from his words.

"What do the rest of us amount to?"

She gave him the full luster of her eyes.

"Some day I'll tell you what you amount to. And you can't say that we haven't our points. Minnie Thayer can dance better than most professionals, and Wilfred Ferguson is an artist in mixing drinks, and Jennie Paget ought to be on the stage. And as for me——"

"Yes," he teased, "what do you

amount to? I'd give a lot to know. I spend hours of my valuable time pondering that very question."

Her eyes grew somber and she answered with entire seriousness.

"If I'd been a man, I'd have been a famous chemist—discovered things."

"Unharnessed the power of the atom?"

"Perhaps."

"You're dangerous enough already."

Then he added, as she did not respond to his levity: "As for that, there's nothing to prevent a woman from being a scientist nowadays, if she wants to. Why don't you?"

She shrugged her shoulders in a manner that was certainly foreign.

"Because no one expects me to, I suppose. It would be an eccentricity. I'd be considered a freak. It's perfect nonsense, saying women are free. They're just as much trammelled by public opinion as they ever were. You do what your friends expect you to do. After all, they're the people you live with and take your coloring from. And my friends would actually resent one's taking a serious interest in anything except society. They consider that serious enough."

"But do you work at something? Surely, I've heard——"

She gave a disdainful flick of her fingers.

"Perfumes. I have a little laboratory at the top of the house, and I dabble in that. I send the products to charity bazaars or give them away as presents." She reached a flexible arm over the back of the sofa, and lifted a tiny glass bottle from the table behind her. "You needn't look so amused, as though you pitied my friends. Try it first."

Rather distrustfully Ridgway removed the stopper and ventured.

"Why, it's exquisite," he uttered in slightly surprised accents. "Equal, I should say, to the best they send from that place in Persia that claims to lead

the world. Where did you learn? In the East?" He continued to give the flacon the respectful attention that a discriminating man accords excellence in any field.

"No, that's a fable, though I sometimes let people believe it. It gives one the cachet of mystery. I learned while I was in Paris, which is the second perfume center, I suppose. Who taught me, do you think?"

He considered.

"I know! Madame de Trailles, of course. Everybody is aware that she runs a most exclusive little shop, under another name. The proceeds are supposed to go to her charities. It's still less usual in France for women to go into business than it is in England, where several titled women have done it. Madame is thrifty, though she has money enough. I know my feet used to freeze to the parquet of her salon, and her refreshments were of the slightest. How did she come to teach you her secrets? The reason her perfumery is so successful is because it's composition is a secret, a direct inheritance from De Pompadour or De Parabère, or one of those well-dressed ladies."

"Madame de Montespan," Rita corrected him. "Madame de Trailles denied explicitly that she was related to her, but the secrets were genuine. When I was staying at the Rue Monceau for the holidays, I think I learned out of sheer boredom. There was nothing else to do. Madame was crazy about her work, and she took the greatest fancy to me, and even wanted me to stay with her and go into the business. She said I had the hand for it. But when I refused she said——"

"Well?"

She was looking beyond him, and it came to him that her face, too, was like a secret. There must be wonderful discoveries to be made in a nature like hers. The women whom he had known suddenly suffered by contrast. After

all, their subtlety could be reduced to very simple terms. Their formula was either, "I want to be admired," or— even more fundamental—"I want to be loved." Rita could promise something more labyrinthine than that.

"I may tell you sometime," she answered provocatively. And, not for the first time, he wondered what she thought of him. It was no good asking because he could forestall her answer, given with all the seriousness in the world: "You prove that at last we are producing a breed of young diplomats who can hold their own with those of European countries, not only in brains and astuteness but in manner and polish." She would give you what you most wanted, but you could never be sure that she wasn't enjoying your credulity if you believed her.

"Madame de Trailles gave me permission to use some of her recipes, on the understanding that I didn't set up a rival establishment. And people like them," she told him.

"I don't wonder. And what a charming flask you have."

"My own touch; copied from a tear bottle; ancient Roman."

He was trying the perfume again, not experimentally this time, but confidently yielding himself to its faint, evasive magic.

"What is it like?" he wondered aloud. "Not in the least that horrible Oriental shop smell—not like chypre—and yet it's the most un-Nordic odor I've ever encountered." Across the wave of scent that transfused the air and did something quite special to the brain, he sent a long look into her eyes, a look that changed the expectancy hovering in them into a smile.

"Circe!" said Ridgway.

Although Rita's description of Margie Stafford would have warned most men off, it had created curiosity in Glyn Ridgway. Her failure to fit might

mean, not that she was uninteresting, but that she was original. He had seen so much abroad of the American girl who had made herself famous, and justly so, precisely because of her ability to adapt herself, anywhere and everywhere, that Margie's inadaptability promised something new. Unless she was hopelessly stupid or unattractive.

He recognized at the first glance that she was neither. He had expected the breezy and Western touch, the cow-girl type, too uncomplicated and natural. Rita's crowd affected nature only when it was becomingly dressed up. They liked country houses and country clubs, and they patronized rather than cultivated horses and sports, but the real country would have reduced them to the status of babes in the woods of the most helpless kind.

There was nothing of the wilderness about Margie Stafford, except a wholesome liking for outdoors. She had once even scored heavily, to his amusement, because of the upbringing of which Rita spoke so contemptuously. At a lunch given by the Thayers the guest of honor had been a foreign personage of supreme distinction, whose interest in polo was marked. Carver Thayer, whose experience had been more connected with buffis and bears than with horses, was floundering, out of his depth, trying to answer some very technical questions concerning the breeding of ponies in this country. Suddenly the quiet young woman, well at the other end of the table, spoke up, and in a clear though slightly flurried voice gave the required information. It appeared that her brother bred horses, and she had lived on his ranch.

After lunch, as it seemed to Ridgway, the distinguished guest had made an effort to resume the conversation, and had been delicately but definitely circumvented by his hostess. And then Ridgway got the keynote. The set represented Margie—didn't want her. They

were determined that she should be submerged, crowded out.

A second point that came home to him was that a different breed of people would see in this misfitting, this discomfort which she caused, something to Margie's credit. Rita's circle had surprised him. Clever as they were, there was an unmistakable coarseness about some of them. Subjects were discussed which formerly would not have been tolerated. Queer people were received, if only they managed to be amusing, and their irregularities condoned. In the society in which he had lived for the last two years morals were not puritanical, but the standard of manners had been high, and there had been certain rules. Here the rules were in a state of flux. Nobody knew how far he—or she—could safely go, and the result was that chances were taken which would once have been fatal.

One couldn't imagine Margie taking chances or even sharing the impulses which risked them. Her conversational range also was limited. She never gave the sense of worldly experience which lay like a bold landscape behind Rita's talk. Or, he wondered, did Margie seem limited because her interests were different, and therefore kept to herself? She read a good deal, even on technical subjects like farming. After the lunch which had betrayed her knowledge of horses, he met her one morning, riding in a bridle path of the Park. She gave him mount a swift, appraising glance, almost before she recognized the rider.

His real reason for joining her was a curiosity to learn whether her small triumph had been merely a lucky strike, or whether she understood the subject. He came to the conclusion that she did, and to another conclusion as well. She was immensely attractive, and quite at her best on horseback. Her skin could dare the sunlight, and her long, slim figure sat her horse with a natural poise not taught in riding schools.

Threads of brown rayed in from the outer rims of her irids, and her hair had a warm, coppery glow that went with her decided rosininess.

"You're a remarkable girl," he said, and meant it.

"How?" The pink deepened a trifle.

"Well——" He paused. If this had been Rita, he would have expressed his frank appreciation of her physical make-up. Somehow, it seemed an impertinence. "Well, the other day at the Thayers. Why did you let them cut between you and the lion? Why didn't you assert yourself? Any other girl there would have done it."

She gave him a long, thoughtful scrutiny.

"Why should I?"

The question pulled him up. Then and there he decided to take advantage of the childhood intimacy they had known.

"Look here, Margie," he said with a naturalness that was intentional; "getting into the limelight is half the battle—getting picked out as the top of the basket."

"And suppose I don't care to get into the limelight?"

"Then you're even more remarkable than I supposed."

He could hardly believe in her sincerity. No, girl, thrown into the social battlefield, could really be indifferent. And yet she had all the signs of sincerity. She was as genuine—he cast round for a comparison—as the perfume of wild flowers—that was it!—just as the other women were like the distilled and bottled variety, some of them with that heavy, basic hint of musk that made one shudder a little. He played with the idea, remembering how a famous scientist had once arranged a sort of musical scale of perfumes. This girl was a high, clear note, and Rita— He stopped. You would have to look for her somewhere in the conservatory.

In Margie's place Rita would have

forced them to want her, have proved her value. She might have been right. This girl Margie must be as proud as the devil; too proud to fight, in fact. Understanding that she was unwelcome, she was letting the case go by default. Rita would have fought it. And first and foremost, in the delicate language of the day, Rita would have hooked a man.

As the crowning proof of Margie's insipidity, Rita had given the fact that she hadn't even done that. Men danced with her, did not leave her out in the cold, but none of them had manifested that devouring interest that alone counted. And here Glyn Ridgway noted another difference in the American scene. Formerly, the attention of a man, too cordially allowed, had been detrimental to a girl's popularity. Other men were apt to suppose that she meant to marry him, and so they lost interest and stood aside. But now the possession of a dangler, a private man, seemed almost a qualification for entrance into certain sets. People were paired off—even married couples, though these were not paired off with each other. Wilfred Ferguson was accepted as Rita's own property, though there were others who either had had a turn or were waiting to cut in. Carver Thayer, for instance, manifested for her a heavy, bantering devotion that did not seem to alarm his wife nor rouse scandal, but that was surprisingly suggestive of the real thing.

But, if Margie declined to take up arms for herself, she was not without a champion. There was no pride in Mrs. Stafford when it came to fighting for her daughter's success. Her lack of strategy, her gratitude for reinforcements, her resentment against ambushes, would have been funny had it not been pathetic. And when it came to the sinews of war her munificence stopped at nothing.

"She's so anxious to do everything," Rita declared. "If I mentioned that

live elephants were now being used as hatracks, you'd find one waiting in her hall next week—with platinum-tipped tusks, naturally—to hang your hat on. And you'd be morally certain that she'd made a conscientious effort to secure a white elephant."

Ridgway laughed, not so much at the statement as at Rita's way of putting it. He found her personality more and more enthralling. The supple body that could sprawl or romp without losing its intrinsic elegance, the cool, porcelain smoothness of her cheeks which she made up lightly, because, as she explained, she felt—like the Chinese ladies—indecently uncovered without any. He knew that he was on the brink of falling in love with Rita, and there were moments when he was not sure of his footing. He liked her frankness infinitely better than a pretense that she had received only a denatured and expurgated account of the world. It seemed to him to show a finer courage. So did her fearless sampling of life. She might be making mistakes, sowing a few not very wild oats. Later, after having tried a good many things, she would, he was confident, choose the best.

It tickled his sense of humor to reflect that what he meant by that was that she would choose him. It sounded abominably conceited, but all the same he knew that he could offer her something worth while. He had, over and above the material advantages, which were not inconsiderable, the determination to make life for himself, and equally for the woman who should be his mate, the very best experience that the opportunities warranted. He could offer an interesting future.

Only—to his own surprise—he was not ready to offer it yet. Possibly this was because he had a fear of being used with the other samples. Rita was still at the experimental stage. Better to wait until the effervescence settled

down rather than to be picked up as a fad, and dropped like a fad.

Then an episode took place which showed him that his waiting had been motivated by an underlying and quite unconscious wisdom, a caution which had often saved him, incomprehensibly, during his diplomatic experiences, when reason could not possibly have looked ahead and conned the road of destiny.

All that evening he had felt that something was up, some plan not devoid of mischief. There had been a sparkle in Rita's eyes, and a tendency to trill in Minnie Thayer's flexible voice. They had all been brought together by one of Mrs. Stafford's determined parties. This time the crowd had not evaded it because Mrs. Stafford, with what Rita called a certain low cunning, had managed to provide them with what they really wanted. She had contrived to get seats for the first night of a famous French revue company, transplanted for a short visit to this country. After the performance, which had been breathtaking enough for their satisfaction, they had come to the Stafford's for supper and dancing. The good lady was expanding with what was to her the most delightful sensation—the entertainment of her daughter's friends, or, rather, the sight of her daughter, as she fondly considered, as the center of the scene. In spite of himself, Ridgway could not help understanding why Rita persisted in calling Mrs. Stafford rural. She was almost too hospitable, too genial, too full of the country milk of human kindness. She reminded him of an expansive and unsuspecting sea anemone, which roused in the malicious the impulse of an impish boy to poke the creature and see whether it wouldn't curl up in amazement and confusion.

Then Rita administered the poke.

The first perfect course was barely over—Mrs. Stafford's food was invariably a work of art of the elaborately rococo school—when Rita glanced at

Wilfred Ferguson, then at Minnie Thayer. The former reluctantly glanced at his plate; the latter nodded. Rita rose. Her manner was just as usual—the manner of a person who is doing the only thing which could be done. Her cool voice was evidently the signal to most of the others, a signal which they had been expecting.

"Perfectly ripping time, Mrs. Stafford. So sorry we have to be going on." She moved toward the door and the crowd, uttering the suave nothings, followed her. Some of the men looked embarrassed.

Even Margie's hand on her arm was not enough to restrain poor Mrs. Stafford's expostulations and protests. But they mustn't go yet. Supper had just begun. And they must dance. The music— When she realized that nothing would keep them a piteous smile appeared on her face. She tried gallantly but altogether inadequately to live up to the situation. It had been too unexpected.

Rita had given Ridgway a little nod which had come to be between them a signal that she wanted him. He went after her into the street. The whole thing had taken him by surprise, but he asked her sharply, as he put her into her motor:

"What's it all about?"

"We're going on." She mentioned the cabaret of the moment. "Come along."

"Isn't Margie going with us?"

She gave an impatient wave of her hands.

"Goodness, no! Can't you live without her for one evening?" The impish smile he knew flowed over her face. "Wilfred's going with me, but I could do with a spare man."

"No, thank you," he said coldly. Her laugh floated to him, but there seemed to him a jarring note and little amusement in it.

He waited on the pavement for another second, seething with a dull anger.

So Rita had told the truth. Anything went nowadays; manners had gone to the dogs. The cruelty, the vulgarity of it! The slap had been preconcerted, an experiment, a dare. He could hear Rita saying, "She'll swallow it. She'll invite us all again next week. She'll stand for anything to keep Margie hanging onto our skirts."

And she had mixed him up with it, made him a part of it! Well, he could, at least, put that right. He dismissed the idea of following the party, bringing Margie with him. He was sure that she would refuse. No, he would simply go in again and spend the evening quietly in the Stafford house. They should see that at least one of the gang hadn't relapsed into the stone age.

If he had known what was in store for him, he might have hesitated. The butler was still holding the door open for him, uncertain whether he meant to return or not. Ridgway did so. He walked back to the dining room and entered unannounced. He was about to withdraw as promptly, with a sense of having stupidly intruded, when Margie looked up and saw him.

She was bending over her mother, and that unfortunate lady was seated at the table, gazing at the remains of her rejected feast with the blank desolation of Marius regarding the ruins of Carthage. She was also exactly like a small-town matron in charge of an inadequate missionary barrel or church sociable which had missed fire.

"I wouldn't have believed it if I hadn't seen it," she said. That, though history fails to record the fact, may perfectly well have been the authentic speech of Marius.

Then she caught sight of Ridgway, and her look was the most strangely human thing he had ever seen. She might have shown embarrassment. Instead, she got it across to him that he had made a friend for life.

She went with him into the drawing-

room, leaving Margie, as he supposed, to dismiss the musicians and give orders for the rest of the preparations to be suppressed. And then, to his horror, Mrs. Stafford proceeded to tell him all about it.

It was ridiculous; it was frightfully touching. It was the triviality of social climbing and the tragedy of a mother's struggle to put her daughter where that daughter's destiny might be most happily achieved. As he listened, it seemed to Ridgway that this was just as moving as any of the famous stories of mothers whose struggles have come up from the slums or the tiny farms. The woman wasn't thinking of herself in the least; she was anguishing all for Margie. There was a sublimity about it. He had assisted in many extraordinary interviews, in the way of his profession, and he was able, perhaps, to meet human motives more directly than most. Before Margie joined them, Ridgway had made with her mother a compact which was singular enough, and he had made it with a simplicity which matched her own.

"Don't worry, Mrs. Stafford," he said. "After this, I promise you that Margie will have as good a time as anybody. All she needs is some one to bring her out, encourage her. She thinks too modestly of herself. She's really most attractive. She merely lacks self-confidence. And," he added grimly, "I'll see to that."

Her thanks were as profuse as he feared they would be. Then she flushed and said with some confusion:

"And don't be afraid that we'll misunderstand. We'll know it's just your old friendship for us."

The connotation made his own face a trifle warm. At the same time he realized the sound sense of the woman. With this confidence in her mind, he could safely wait for the assurance to come from her when he had done enough.

Then Margie came in.

When he was again outside the house Ridgway knew, with some surprise, that he had not been bored in the slightest. The girl's manner had been perfect. There was nothing to show that she had been wounded by the affront, nor was there anything to show that she stressed the significance of his return. He would be entirely safe; like her mother, she could be counted on not to misunderstand.

The next day he tried to have it out with Rita, only to realize that Rita was a chameleon, a female Proteus, who changed shape and color under your grasp and declined to be brought to book under any circumstances. Rita was a law unto herself. The only way to impress her was by actions, conduct.

He proceeded to make the impression.

After this no one could say that Margie had not captured a man. The set, which had come to regard him as Rita's property, even, perhaps, as one of the "dangerous dates" that might become a serious parti, accepted the change. As the season went on Ridgway found, to his amusement, that his allegiance made all the difference. If the crowd wanted him, it found that it had to have Margie, too, and it did want him. He realized that it was treating him like royalty, and that this was primarily because Rita valued him. She set the pace, struck the note. Undoubtedly the attempt to crowd Margie out had been her work; the others hadn't cared enough.

The certainty came to him in a flash, one night when he met Rita halfway down a crowded staircase, as he was working his way up. They exchanged a few rapid-fire remarks.

"Where have you been, Glyn?"

"Busy."

"So I hear. Congratulate you on your taste."

"Don't you consider it good?"

"Yes, but so quiet!" She had laughed but her eyes had not. They had been brilliantly resentful.

The encounter had set him thinking seriously. He had no intention of risking the loss of Rita through kindness of heart to another girl. She still meant more to him than any other woman. At the same time, he had found Margie surprisingly profitable, and he had every desire to see her through. For one thing, she demanded so little from him. She liked him; she enjoyed with him whatever good things came their way; but she did not give herself up to them. Indifference would have killed his interest in her, but she was not indifferent. He was sure of that now. She was—detached. His friendship failed to strike her depths, but he was convinced that depths existed. Occasionally he had wondered whether her detachment didn't mean that she lived on a higher plane than the rest of them, that she had an absorbing interest somewhere, which left only her attractive shell to carry on the ordinary traffic of life.

And yet he could not keep away from Rita. He ignored the warning that he felt in his own mind; the warning that Rita was perilous, a good person to leave alone. Her lure persisted. And now, because he looked for it, he found her watching him. He knew from his own experience how wholesomely alive a tentative love affair may be kept by the transfusion of a little jealousy. Rita and Wilfred Ferguson were constantly together; their engagement was hinted at. He was a bit ashamed of himself, but he knew that his friendship for Margie was evoking jealousy in Rita. There was a strangeness in her long, Slavic eyes. He told himself that he would do the best thing for himself if he were to cut loose from her altogether and devote himself to the simpler, saner girl. It could be done. The will could do wonders. At the same time, he knew that an evening with Rita,

even a dance with her, was enough to undermine his good resolutions.

He met her constantly, moreover. One afternoon he came upon her in a corner of a crowded drawing-room, and, after the crowd had melted away around them, she lost control of herself, if such a thing could be said of a woman who gave none of the outward signs of violent feeling. Only the edge in her voice told him. Without a word of warning she said brusquely:

"You're getting that girl talked about."

"What girl?"

"You know very well. Heaven knows our ways aren't narrow, but such touching devotion as yours can mean only one thing. Are you going to marry her?"

"She hasn't done me the honor of indicating——"

She did not give him the chance to finish. His mocking tone infuriated her.

"Then you'd better leave her alone. You're ruining her chances of marrying anybody."

"Oh, no," he said lightly; "not anybody."

"Who then?"

"Well, you've suggested me."

He had not meant it. As she swung away from him he almost told her so, but some tiresome people got between them. Her face had turned chalky under the make-up, and her eyes had flamed. He was extraordinarily stirred. He couldn't explain to her here, but he knew that the next time they were alone together he would have a great deal to say. What was the use of waiting, of playing with one's obvious fate? A woman who could twist his heartstrings was certainly worth risking the future for—risking the future with, because she would most surely be a part of it.

That evening he was engaged, unbreakably so. The next morning when he rang up the Seymour house the

butler's discreet voice informed him that Miss Seymour had left town early, on a visit to Mrs. Craven, her married sister, in Philadelphia. He was not altogether sorry, in the light of the prosaic forenoon, that time to consider had been thrust upon him. At the same time he was dominated by a perfectly inconsistent impulse to look up trains. It was impossible to remain indoors, and, with some idea of walking himself into a state of reason, he went out and strolled toward the Park. In Paris he had got into the habit of considering parks and gardens the natural places to walk in, or at least through.

He had been walking for half an hour, making the practically irresistible comparisons between the municipal efficiency of France and America, as expressed in the upkeep of public grounds, when he noticed the figure of a woman, walking rapidly, some distance in front of him. In another moment he was certain, though he had never seen Rita, walk like that. He quickened his pace and overtook her.

"This is luck," he exclaimed. "I was told that you had gone away."

His heart jumped because he was suddenly sure that hers had, at the sound of his voice, and that a woman less self-controlled would have started violently. She was dressed very plainly, he noticed, in a long dark coat and small hat, without the superb furs which she usually wore, and she was carrying a small, square parcel. Having heard her opinion of women who allowed themselves to do such things, he put out his hand for it. She shook her head.

"No, thank you. I changed my mind—I mean, I lost my train. It doesn't matter. I can go to-morrow."

"All the better for me, my dear."

"Come home to lunch with me." She turned as she spoke, and he supposed that she, like himself, had been walking toward the unfashionable side of the Park, merely to kill time.

She left him in the drawing-room with the brief excuse that she must tell her mother, who probably wouldn't be at home anyway, that she had been delayed. He stood where she had left him, by the table on which she had dumped her gloves, and a small handbag, and the white parcel. Her excitement, the thrill which he felt through her disjointed phrases, had communicated itself to him. They were on the threshold of tremendous, crucial things. At least he was going to find out whether that rumor of her engagement to Ferguson was more than a rumor. It couldn't be true. He had felt Rita's arm trembling against his as they had passed through the doorway. Her unrest was tingling in his veins.

With the lover's instinct to touch what has just been near the beloved, he dropped his hand over the little pile on the table. He ran the gloves through his fingers, then picked up the box.

He had about it no particular curiosity. He read the address absent-mindedly. The frown that came between his eyebrows was that of a man trying to remember some matter which had escaped him.

The parcel was addressed to Miss Margie Stafford. It was the handwriting that was strange, because it was like print, and done badly, like the work of an illiterate person. There was a common look about the whole thing. The paper—surely Rita wouldn't send a present to a friend looking like this. Even the fastening—

An indescribable sound at the door made him look up sharply. And from that instant he knew; he was sure. Rita stood there. Her gasp, her half-raised hand that implored him to put the thing down, were a confession. He had had no idea of opening the parcel, but now, without taking his glance from hers, he deliberately did so.

Inside was a bottle. The cold intelligence which had stepped forward

from the rest of Ridgway's brain, and now took possession of his actions, paid its tribute to Rita's intelligence. It was not a common bottle, though it resembled hundreds of those in which perfumes are sold. It was pretty, with a commercial prettiness as far removed as possible from the selected beauty of the tear bottle, the shape which she had chosen for her precious scents, but it was attractive enough to encourage the woman who received it to take out the stopper and investigate the contents. He was about to do so himself when Rita prevented him by a cry of warning, an inarticulate, animal cry. She rushed forward, seizing his hand, and they held the bottle together.

"Give it to me," she panted. "You haven't any right to open——"

He almost laughed. The struggle of their hands was nearly without movement. Her face grew old as she realized that he would not yield. His fingers pushed through hers and clamped themselves on the glass. He lifted the bottle until it was on a level with her face and just under his.

"This isn't very thick," he said quietly. "I believe I could smash it. If I did—I suppose it would kill us both."

With only a flicker of the muscles around her mouth she admitted it.

"A chemist as clever as you at perfumes can also make poisons," he went on. "On my honor, unless you tell me all about it—why and how you did this terrible thing—I *will* smash it and send us both to whatever comes next. Sit down there and begin."

"You wouldn't," she whispered. "You're too fond of living."

This time he did laugh.

"Not at this moment. You've pretty well cured me of that. Feeling as I feel just now, I wouldn't give a row of pins for anything. You've disgusted me with it—made me sick. I was up on the crest and you've dumped me into the

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mud. Well, you're going to analyze the mud for me now. If only for Margie's protection, I've got to get at the truth." He added meaningly: "Let go!"

She obeyed him. She let go and sank into the chair which he moved so that he could sit opposite her, their knees all but touching.

"You know why I did it," she said.

Later he might pity her, might relent a little at the memory of the drawn, desperate face, but now he felt brutal enough.

"Suppose we cut out the love-making," he said harshly. "It's inapposite."

He got the story out of her. After the first she pulled herself together; she even stroked back her hair, as a woman involuntarily does after the high winds of emotion have thrashed her, as though they were really winds. Except for an occasional shiver, and her hands that gripped the chair arms like clams, she was much as usual.

Yes, the poison was rather like prussic acid, or at least she thought it must be. It killed at the first breath, without leaving a mark, without even producing any symptoms that might not be attributable to heart failure. If the bottle were left open—and the one who unstopped it would have no time to close it—the stuff passed into the air, vanished, without leaving in the container a trace to be analysed.

"I never heard of such a poison," Ridgway ejaculated. "Where did you get the awful thing?" She answered this as she answered all his questions. It was one of the most painful elements of the scene, as it came back to him—this obedience, this subservience of hers. It betrayed how much he was her master; how her will had capitulated to his.

Old Madame de Trailles had inherited more than the secrets of perfumes. There was an old book, in a faded leather cover, which she kept carefully locked up. Only by chance had Rita seen it, and then the old lady

had explained that it contained something dangerous. It was in Latin, so she had never puzzled it out for herself, but one day she would destroy it. It was not right for such matters to exist. Rita believed that madame's thrift had prevented her from doing so. Because of its age and historical association, the little book was worth money. Perhaps she had a vague idea of selling it to the government, some day, for one of the museums.

And then the little book began to haunt Rita. No, she had had no wish to hurt any one—then.

"It was just the impulse of adventure; the playing-with-fire impulse. Just as women have made pets of snakes. One day she lost her keys, and I—found them. To hold that little book in my hand was wonderful. Like holding a deadly snake, and feeling it contract and expand, according to your pressure. It gave a feeling of power, a feeling of being daring, original, superior."

It sent a chill along his spine to hear her tone become rich and deep, the luxury with which the soul broods on what it cherishes. Rita—this was the real Rita. Luxuriating over holding in her grasp the power of death.

"There were enough prescriptions in that book to finish a city," she was saying. And then she was recalling old stories that he had read, that every one had heard; stories that were history.

The perfumes may have come from Madame de Montespan, the king's favorite, but the secrets in this book went farther back. No wonder old Madame de Trailles had been vague about her connection with the beauty. Heaven alone knew in what crooked ways some ancestor of hers had got hold of this book. He may have had a place in the court which had tried the famous poison cases—the cases in which so many people of rank and importance, including the Montespan herself, had been secretly involved. Because it was here, between

the shabby covers—the authentic deviltry of which the woman Le Voisin and her confederates had been accused; under the very names that history knows, some of them—"the powder of love," which wins lovers, the "powder of succession," that removed inconvenient relatives—were here. But there were others; extraordinary potions, that history knows nothing of. Just as the investigation into the series of poisonings which had startled Paris under Louis XIV had been stopped abruptly, and most of the facts suppressed, so had these deadly recipes remained secret. They were too dangerous for the public even to suspect. Think! Poisons that could kill with a breath, leaving no trace!

And only because of the prompting of the spirit of adventure, only to feel more wise and more powerful and more important than others, Rita had copied one or two of them. Still with the same rich brooding in her eyes, she said slowly: "And the king must have known, very soon after he began to love Madame de Montespan, that she was going to these people, that she had associations with poisoners. There's even a document to prove it, signed with his name, dated 1668, that seems to prove it. That extraordinary woman, Arvède Barine, has written about it. And he swallowed it, let it make no difference, forgave her."

"How could you make up your mind to use the thing?" he asked. He still found it incredible. His mind refused to accept it, until another veil dropped from this Rita whom he was beginning to know.

Her head went up defiantly.

"I take what I want. I've never needed to use this method before, but—it didn't seem very unnatural. You don't suppose that it's a new thing—this getting rid of obstructions—even among 'nice' people? Every now and then there's a silly mistake, and people suspect. After all, I have only one life,

and I made up my mind long ago to get the most out of it. You can do it if you're strong enough. Remorse is weakness. It's unhealthy. I'm strong. For years I've lived with this idea, waiting for the day to come when I might meet the thing I must have, that I couldn't do without. I didn't want anything to prevent me from putting out my hand and taking it, anything stronger than I was on that day—not even my conscience; not even my self-respect."

After a pause she said, under her breath:

"You came!"

He could feel the skin of his hand, the hand which had touched hers a few minutes before, crawl with loathing.

"And to-day I was the silly mistake which upset your plans, I suppose. You intended to establish an alibi, if one were needed, by making it appear that you had left town before this bottle had been sent, by the train you 'missed.' How did you mean to send it to Margie?"

She told him that, too. By parcel post, from a branch office in a neighborhood where she never went. She had worn nothing noticeable, and she had in her pocket a veil which she had intended to put on. It would have been most difficult to identify her among the scores of women who were dressed as she was. There would be nothing to associate her with the parcel. The bottle was like thousands. Even the paper and string were not the sort kept in the house. And she had handled everything with gloves. She had thought it out exhaustively. It would have been altogether safe. Why should she want to injure Margie? She was supposed to be in love with Wilfred. Who knew that she loved Glyn and raged against the girl who was taking him from her? Safe—quite safe.

When a long silence had fallen between them he got stiffly to his feet. He had hardly moved for ages. He slipped the bottle into his pocket, twisted in

his handkerchief. He would drop it into the river. He spoke, and, as she understood as well as he did, named his terms.

"You will destroy those formulas you copied and the ingredients you used. And you will not attempt to hurt Margie again because—it would be of no use to you."

That brought her to her feet.

"You mean—I've lost you? Isn't there anything—Glyn!" Her eyes burned up to him. "Isn't a love that is so overmastering, so—so whole that it stops at nothing—isn't that worth having? Some men would know that it was."

This was the strangest—not that she had crossed into a region where modesty and reserve no longer existed, but that she should still be in doubt as to his feeling for her. He wondered what more he could say.

"I promised you once to tell you what Madame de Trailles said to me when I refused to stay with her. 'You are right; love, not science, will be everything for you.' She was right."

He answered, every nerve in his body in terror lest she should touch him.

"You haven't the least glimmer of an idea what love means." Then he smiled, more cruelly than he knew. "King Louis may have found it possible to forgive corruption. I can't." He left her with that.

It was not until several days later that he felt spiritually clean, with an imagination washed sufficiently clear to encounter Margie. He wanted to outlive the horror that had been thrust upon him. He knew that she did not need his protection. The attempt against her would never again be made. Rita was not a fool.

During those days of waiting he definitely made up his mind to achieve the effort of will that selects a woman from the rest of the race and makes her the goal of a man's hopes. The honesty,

the goodness of Margie's nature seemed the most desirable of all things. With her he would be safe from straying into byways where monsters lurked. The horror extended to himself, because he had been capable of caring for a monster. His most imperative need was to get rid of that sensation, to disprove it, to convince himself that he had better moral taste than that, a straighter intuition.

In the over-furnished boudoir which was Mrs. Stafford's peculiar pride he found Margie, but not alone. She was companioned by a stalwart, good-looking young man who was presented as Mr. Jefferson Jewell, of Arizona, and who gave Ridgway's hand a powerful clasp and expressed his pleasure in the encounter. His manner inspired liking and confidence, but he was as incongruous with his present surroundings as a marble statue of Shelley would be in a rodeo.

At the first glance Ridgway had taken in the change which had passed over Margie, or rather, not passed over but remained, like a deep glow from within. She was interested, profoundly interested. Her detachment had faded like morning dew. It hardly needed her explanation, delivered without the slightest confusion, though with a delightful increase of color, to acquaint him with the very evident facts of the case.

"Mother begged us to wait a year," she said. "You see, Jeff is in business with my brother Arthur, on the ranch. Mother said it would be burying me alive, and it wasn't fair not to let me see the world, in case"—she shot a glance at the young man, who saw the joke—"in case I decided that I liked some one else better. The year is up to-day. Aren't you going to wish us happiness, Glyn?" She gave his coat sleeve a little pat which expressed more affection for him—now that she was losing him—than she had ever let him

see before. "This, Jeff, is one of my very best friends," she said sweetly. "Next best to you."

If the diplomatic service teaches anything, it inculcates a decent control of countenance. Ridgway gave expression to the proper sentiments. He hesitated over her outstretched hand, having been for two years in the habit of kissing hands gracefully. Then he bent and kissed her cheek instead, taking the privilege of an old comrade. Margie meant more to him than was to be implied by any convention, however graceful. With admirable tact he took his leave.

On a console in the hall stood a vase of flowers; the poet's narcissus that one finds in old-fashioned gardens, rising out of a bed of ferns such as one comes across in the woods. With a smile for his own sentimentality, he disengaged a bit of each. How exquisite the fragrance was—how natural, how redolent of dreams!

The smile was still on his face but had altered its quality a trifle when he reached the street. He looked the Avenue up and down and shrugged faintly.

"Back to the sweet simplicity of Paris for me," he said to himself. "New York is getting to be too complicated."

MILADY who is contemplating the purchase of a new bonnet may rejoice that she did not live in England in the reign of Henry VII, when it was illegal to sell a hat for more than two shillings.

MADRID has always been the city of night life, where no one dines until nine o'clock, theaters close after midnight, and nocturnal revels in cafés and taverns last through the night. But now a curfew rings at three o'clock in the morning to close all establishments at that late, or early hour. It is a new form of night light saving, where coal is scarce.

MODERN Chinese girls, rebelling against betrothals arranged for them in infancy, are asserting their freedom by inserting in the local papers advertisements, declaring that they decline to recognize the betrothals arranged for them in infancy and that they reserve for themselves the right to select their life partners. Again the modern woman declares her independence.

"KISSING is least dangerous at midnight," declares an expert who classifies kissing as an extra-hazardous occupation because of possible contagion from germs. The morning kiss is deadly dangerous, while the danger decreases steadily until at midnight it is least dangerous of all. The morning grouch will now have an alibi for his omission of affectionate demonstrations.

STARS in the movie firmament twinkle, fade, and fail rapidly. A career of five years' duration is generous and few stars shine more than eight years. The camera is a stern betrayer of youth's passing, whereas the footlights soften the effects of the passage of time; and personality, voice, and technique can endure an actress to the public long after the flight of youth. Sarah Bernhardt, Duse, and Ellen Terry had that genius—but never a screen star before a camera.

The Crow's Nest

By Berthe K. Mellett

Author of "Tide of the Taverners,"
"Three Women," etc.



A CROW'S nest is a high point from which a view is obtained.

The view may be of land or of water or of the hidden things of the heart. Occasionally a crow's nest is a spiritual pinnacle, reared by the soul out of its own fabric, and when such is the case the view is infallible. More often it is a tangible structure of steel or rock or earth or timber, thrown up by some wise old navigator of life who understands that any height is better than no height, and that those who cannot climb with their souls must be provided with means to get as high as they can with their hands and legs.

When Rockland Elliot—"Rock" Elliot as he was known by reason of the tracks and bridges and skyscrapers into which his genius and integrity and labor had materialized—built the Crow's Nest in the West Virginia mountains, he may have realized that he was going on, past the office of human decision and guidance which he had so faithfully held, and that those he left behind would some day stand in need of an altitude from which to look down and observe—themselves.

At any rate he built the Crow's Nest—a vignette masterpiece of engineering—a house like a dream perched upon a crag to which the only access was a lacy scarf of bridge hung on chains from supports of steel that arched like

bent whips above the chasm they spanned.

He built it, and spent a lone week in it, thinking the last thoughts of a life that had been all thought and labor, and then he died. And when he was gone they found a letter that even the woman to whom it was addressed could not understand.

Mary, my beloved, I am leaving everything to you. I have been up as high as my heavy heart and the power of a motor would carry me, and I have seen that I must leave it all to you. There are such things as trust funds, I know, and human methods of securing wealth against the erosion of time and chance and human frailty. There is more wealth than you suspected, and there is our little Janice. I am leaving both in your hands, with no other safeguard than my faith. You will be surprised—you, the woman who is still a child, the flower that has cared for nothing but to bloom sweetly in the shadow of my strength. That strength has been only a shadow, shortening and dimming, and now it is gone. Reliance upon my own strength, upon all strength, has vanished from me, and I fling my hope around something more trustworthy in you. I am leaving everything to you—Janice, the wealth which will make her one of the great heiresses of America.

The letter had two effects. In Mary Elliot it wrought bewilderment, an increased sense of helplessness, a devastation of grief. In Janice it begot a religion; a strange, distorted religion composed equally of deification of her dead father and dissatisfaction with the min-

ister he had left behind him who could find no worthier ritual for his glorification than tears and endless recitals of the romantic manner in which she had been loved. Her father, Rock Elliot—the builder whose bridges only grew stronger as the seas beat against them, whose skyscrapers withstood the shock of earthquake and the heat of fire, whose lines of track were still as straight and smooth as the day they were laid down—belittled by a woman whose tears sprang at the mention of his name, and who never ceased to tell that she had married at sixteen and always been carried to her carriage by her husband when the ground was damp!

At ten years of age, when her father died, that story began to get on Janice's nerves. At eighteen, when the psychology of the era swept through the barriers of home and school, releasing her from little girlhood into the bright, hard débutante field of sophistication and jazz, sophistry and undisputed confidence in her own cleverness, Janice became a rebel, a more or less guerrilla fighter sniping upon the ghosts of memory and pride and grief among which her mother lived.

"Oh, for gosh sakes, turn off the water works," Janice was wont to burst forth when she came upon the other apparently going down for the last time in a gently flowing river of tears. "Take a brace! Listen! I'll go down and shake up a drink that'll put a spine in your back."

"Janice, if your father——"

Whereupon Janice would slam through the door and, whistling shrilly, pull on a hat and coat—any hat and coat—and sally forth. Creeping to the window, Mary Elliot would stare through her tears at that painful enigma which was her offspring. What was it all about? What had happened since Rock Elliot died? Vaguely she attributed all disturbances to that event. Nothing had been wrong before it. Girls

—the world—everything had been sweetly lovely before. But he had died and left it all in her hands, and it all had gone into a mess with which she could not cope.

And Janice, striding down the street, or stamping blindly in the driveway until the car came around, would blow upon the fire eating at her interior with the wind of outraged piety. Her father—that god who should be celebrated with thunders and triumphs—reduced to offerings of sniffles upon his altar. Worse than sniffles. If she had stayed long enough, she'd have heard that story again—the maddening one about a man like him carrying ninety-seven pounds of lace and blond hair and blue eyes across the curb.

Janice had read her Freud with the best of them, but she didn't know that jealousy was consuming her. She only knew she had to torture the woman who tortured her. Torture and run. Yes, run—get away—so far away that she couldn't hear tears falling or feel the impact of familiar inanities upon her ears again. Physical removal was difficult. There was that rotten arrangement which left everything to Mary. Even mental distance was hard, since the only way out of mental environment is upward. But clamor could be set up—clamor which ought in time to drown out the whispering tide of sorrow and recollection washing her home. Thank Heaven for clamor; for dances and bands, and automobiles, and shops and teas and cigarettes and men and girls and high, tired voices and swarming, bumping crowds.

Things were at this pass between Janice Elliot and her mother when Siegfried Svarik came upon the scene. People like Siegfried didn't often come to Baltimore. They usually shone in the more diplomatic atmosphere of Washington. But Siegfried mentioned no connection with Washington. His mission, he intimated obscurely, was

commercial and secret. As he announced, also obscurely, that he was of two nationalities, Polish and Swedish, there rose some confusion as to which legation might be asked for information. But his car—a large, black Hispana Suiza with the most minutely conspicuous of coronets on its panels—appeared, and the horse power and coronets made sweetest concord of confusion. The only person of consequence who did not appear to enter into the symphony of delight which presently began, and steadily swelled in volume, was Mary Elliot, the mother of Janice.

"Janice, dear"—Mary Elliot made an odd, futile gesture as though she would draw her child to her bosom—"his hair rides back too smoothly from his forehead. And he dances too well."

Janice replied by releasing herself roughly from the clinging arms, and throwing her own sleek, black head up in the manner of a colt indignant at the bit which some soft fool thought could be insinuated between tightly clenched teeth. She had come in for one of those scant pauses which separate the days of modern youth into hectic splashes of color and sound. And with the fatigue of the night before, and the morning that was just passing, upon her, she was in no mood for foolishness. In lieu of words she struck a match and lighted a cigarette.

Cigarettes were one of the few innovations over which Mary Elliot no longer shed tears, but now she winced a little and looked away.

"Danny Shotover was here while you were out, and he says——"

"Leave Danny out, will you, and oblige me? Danny gives me the pip."

"Very well, dear—but Danny's quite a man of affairs now, and in your own father's line, too, so his advice would be valuable. He's putting in the new municipal dock down at Cadgton on the Chesapeake, and he says that this Svarik may have heard of the money that will

come to you some day, and that, anyhow, a girl should be protected——"

"Well"—Janice allowed two insolent gray rings of smoke to ascend to the ceiling—"and how do you propose to go about protecting me?"

"That's just it. There used to be ways, but they don't seem to be much good any more. When I was a girl my maid was sent along with me when I went places, and came home with me in the carriage that had been kept waiting. But you take the car by yourself, and I never see you again until you've danced all night and come in telling me that you've already had breakfast of corn cakes and syrup at some restaurant that I never heard of in all my life. I never kept the coachman waiting longer than an hour after midnight, but you don't seem to mind in the least that all the sleep I get is dozing on the sofa until six o'clock when you come in. Then, while I'm still tiptoeing around and hushing the servants so that you, at least, may have some sleep, down you come in breeches for a ride. After that I simply can't keep track of anything. The only way I can even guess whom you've been dancing with is by your slippers. If they're all tramped up and ruined the first time you have them on, I'm sure you've been running with people whose kin I don't know, and never would consent to know. Times may have changed, but I'm sure no gentleman steps on a lady's feet, even now. When your father was paying his devotions to me he used to write poems about my little white feet. And after we were married——"

"Can that!" The lid of a cigarette box on the table crashed down, and a vase splintered on the floor. From the hallway Janice put her head back through the door. "I'm sick of that tale—do you hear me? Sick of it! If I ever hear it again, I'll run away. I may do it, anyway. As for Siegfried Svarik, I'm crazy about him, and I'll

take care of myself in my own way without any assistance from either you or Danny Shotover."

Mrs. Elliot had pansy-blue eyes, and terror in them looked uncomfortably like some swift and desolating blight falling upon a flower. A slightly rain-washed flower to be sure, but still a flower. Lying back in the car to snatch a moment of rest between dates, Janice closed her lids. And against them as against a reflector she saw her mother's eyes as they had looked when she hurled those parting words back through the narrow crack of the door. Flowers—pansies slashed by a vicious cane. Something plunged against Janice's side and then seemed to stop altogether, contracted and held by a noose of pain.

Reaching for another cigarette she snapped on the lighter. But cigarettes were no good. Her mother's eyes continued to be stricken pansies painted on the fevered lids of her eyes, for all the smoke screen that she tried to raise before them. She grabbed the tube from its silver holder, and spoke to the chauffeur.

"Put me down," she said. "I'll walk."

Once upon the hard asphalt of the pavement her momentarily displaced wrath jarred back into line. She wasn't going to come under that sympathy thing, that filial remorse trick. The way to treat people who tried to get you by looking stricken, was to give them something to look stricken about. She turned abruptly into a drug store and called Siegfried Svarik at his hotel. When she came out she hailed a taxi.

The bumping, rattling vehicle leaped heavily along the broad Maryland road. Out of town it sped, through dense and gradually diminishing suburbs—and suddenly it was in the country. The country! Janice looked about her and her breath came softly through parted lips. She hadn't been in the country—not since she was a little girl! Of

course she'd ridden in it, and motored across it, and house-partied in it, world without end, but she hadn't been conscious of it. And you're not in anything if you're not conscious of it. But now she was alone, and a whole universe of country went circling back of her as she sped. She was on the Wheeling road, and she had told Siegfried to meet her for lunch at the Griffon, a tavern just off the main thoroughfare. It had seemed very daring and smart to be going to the Griffon when she had phoned, but now suddenly it seemed neither daring nor smart nor anything else—except heartbreaking. There'd be no country around the Griffon—only parked cars and gassy smells and screaming people arriving for what they thought was a good time.

But beyond the Griffon, up and up and up until you'd gone so far into the hills that you could go no farther, the Crow's Nest hung on its crag. The Crow's Nest that her father had built, with the lacy bridge hung before it like a scarf—the pinnacle of the world looking down on the silence and peace and immensity below.

Great hunger for the Crow's Nest twisted through her. She stopped the taxi and signed it off and went into a filling station where there was a phone.

"Oh!" Her voice was a gasp of relief as Svarik answered her call. "I'm so glad—I was afraid you'd started. You see we're not going to the Griffon after all. What? Of course not. Of course I'm not afraid of being seen there with you. No; and I'm not afraid of you, either. Certainly I trust you. I trust you so much that—will you keep quiet for a moment and let me talk? Disappointed? But, Siegfried, you won't be disappointed when you hear. It'll be so much nicer than the Griffon—a place where we can be alone for hours, and talk and dream and rest our nerves from screaming voices. What did you say? Yes, quite alone, up in

the mountains in the country. I thought you'd like that. In your car we can make the trip up in two hours, and I needn't be in until late. I'm never in until late. I'll get some sandwiches—we can stop at the Griffon, for that matter, and get them—and there's sure to be something in the storeroom up there; there always has been. You see my father built the place, and my mother has always kept it up, though I haven't been there for ages. I—I want you to know about my father, Siegfried. I want you to see some of the things he did. I——” She choked on some obstruction in her throat. “Well, so long! See you later! Hustle along, there's a dear.” And she rang off.

The big car with the coronets on the panels came singing along the road, swooped to a stop, picked her up, and streamed toward the Griffon. They got their sandwiches, stopped to laugh with some people that they knew, and went on again, followed by knowing glances under lifted eyebrows.

The afternoon was new yet, and spring grew younger and younger as they climbed into the hills, like a child who, half grown, had decided to go back to infancy again.

“You are a very charming and gracious lady,” Siegfried was driving, but, dispensing with the office of one hand upon the wheel, he laid his arm along the slender, relaxed shoulder which a curve of the road had thrown against his own. “Little did I think when I came to America that I should so speedily—I mean that I should find—Are you, by any chance, listening to me?”

Janice brought her attention back from the tangled wall of honeysuckle which hedged the way. The farther they ascended the paler and tenderer were the young leaves of the honeysuckle. In the summer there were wild strawberries along the way, stepping courageously up and up until at last they flung their fruit across the chasm

onto the very crag where the Crow's Nest stood.

“I—I was thinking of other things. I—you see I used to come here when I was a child. I used to come with my mother—after my father died. Then—somehow—I didn't want to come any more—not with mother—and——”

“Your mother?” The glance that he turned on her was searching, but her eyes were back on the honeysuckle wall again. “Your mother—will there be difficulties with your mother, if perchance——”

“And now, strangely enough—just now—I sort of wish I'd kept on coming with my mother. Maybe we'd have understood each other better up here where there is nothing to set nerves on edge. I—maybe I'd have loved my mother better, if——”

“But you will marry one day.” The car was running very slowly now, the eye of the driver sliding from the girl beside him, to the road, and back to the girl again. “You will marry—and then, perhaps, you will come for your honeymoon to your house up here in the mountains—yes?”

“My house?” Her laugh was harsh. “It isn't my house. Nothing is mine. It's all hers—all my mother's to do with as she pleases. If I marry Danny Shot-over, she'll give me the lot—hand out everything down to the very sheets in the cupboard, if I want them. But if I marry to suit myself——”

“Hers? Your mother's? Do you mean to say that——”

“I've got upwards of ten dollars in my purse. When that is gone she'll dole out some more, and when that is gone she'll dole out another dribble. Oh, it's the life, all right!” Her rancor had come back to her again, and she felt easier for the accustomed thorns pricking her mind. Holding her eyes away from the honeysuckle wall and the babyish green of the grasses growing down to the road, she snuggled

farther under the arm across her shoulder.

There was a suggestion of preoccupation, however, in the embrace which held her.

"But when you are twenty-one?"

"Nix! Nothing! Absolute zero."

"That is very——"

"It's all of very—and then some. In this free country we call it the deuce of a fix. If it hadn't been for that, do you think I'd be living on at home—hanging onto my mother's apron strings and making us both so miserable that sometimes—sometimes—like back there a moment ago—I'm actually sorry for her."

"But if you should wish to marry, and your mother did not approve?"

"Oh, I suppose I could go into an office and help out on the rent."

Siegfried Svarik withdrew his arm from her shoulder and gave his eyes entirely to the road.

"However," he said at last, "if one is clever, there are ways to force things which do not come of themselves." A laugh as sharp as his northern features lengthened his thin, pale lips. "How far did you say it would be—to this Crow's Nest that hangs upon a crag?"

He laid his arm along her shoulder again and she nestled into it.

"You were a very clever girl, to think of those sandwiches at the inn," he continued when she did not answer him. "A very clever girl."

Her thoughts were back with the honeysuckle once more.

"I hate being sorry for her," she said. "I hate it fearfully. It hurts. I've never been sorry for her before, that I can remember. But now, suddenly, she seems sort of like a child to me—a child that I ought to look after. Maybe it's the altitude." She laughed with an effort at her old hardness. "Mountain climbing does things to the head. Isn't that what they say?"

"I will trust your head, mademoiselle.

After those sandwiches at the Griffon—I will trust your head."

He stooped and kissed her. She didn't mind. It was the usual thing. But when he had straightened himself again she lifted her hand cautiously and wiped his kiss away.

At seven o'clock that night Danny Shotover was called from his dinner to the telephone.

"If you don't mind, Danny"—it was Mary Elliot's voice, but the intonation was astonishingly crisp and businesslike—"I'd like to have you slip on a heavy coat and run over. Something's come up in which I need your help."

"I'll come immediately. Why the heavy coat?"

"Tell you when I see you. Hurry, please!"

Old, gray-wooled Erasmus at the door told him that Mrs. Elliot was in the garage. Wonderingly Danny found his way around the house and into that well-ordered establishment. Mary Elliot stood on the running board of a small, light car, storing things into and around the back seat.

"What in the world——"

"Close the door, will you? I've sent Bolter away on an errand, so there's no danger of his listening."

"But, Mrs. Elliot—I mean, what in the world——"

"Nothing in the world except that Janice has been a fool, and that you and I have got to go out of our way to make her realize it."

"Janice? Good Heavens! You don't mean that anything has happened to Janice?"

"All I mean is that she's gone up to the Crow's Nest with that Svarik."

"My God! Here, lend me that car. I'll start——"

"Yes," she turned about on the running board, and he saw that her face, far from being marred with the tears which now, if ever, ought to run, was

fresh and pink and animated. "Yes, you'll start immediately and give Svarik a beating, and bring Janice back—and what good will that do? She'll go some place else with him to-morrow or the next day, and a week from now, when the gossip begins to come in, I'll be going to Svarik and making any concession if he'll only marry her. I'm that kind of woman, and he knows it. I belong to an age that married its daughters to the beasts who compromised them—at the end of a shot gun, if they dodged everything else."

"But we can't——"

"No, Danny, certainly we can't sit here while they remain up there alone. And they'll remain—Svarik will see to that if he has to bore holes in the engine of his car. He's smart enough to figure that he could make me pay for the car, too."

"But, if we can't go after them, and if——"

"We can't go after them, but we can happen in on them—you in your dinner clothes and I in the prettiest frock I've had for years. You ought to see the frock I've got on under this coat, Danny, and the way my hair is done and my face massaged. It will look mighty queer to Janice—my turning up at the Crow's Nest, all prettied up, and with you, and both of us covered with surprise and embarrassment to find others there before us."

"I don't like your implication, and I don't think you understand what you're saying. And, even if I entered into this—this questionable scheme, it'd amount to the same thing and be less dignified and forceful than my going alone and giving Svarik the licking he's got coming to him."

"You're wrong, Danny. Because, you see, Danny, we're not going to drag Janice back. We're just going to stay on, making up a merry party, having no end of a good time until she's so disgusted and scared——"

"You can't make her stay. You know very well you can't make her stay."

"Oh, yes, I can. I've thought it all out. I thought it all out in the instant that Sally Mason telephoned me that Janice and Svarik had stopped at the Griffon and gone on toward the mountains, and as soon as she had hung up I went right out to make purchases. I've been buying the most compromising things. If there's a safe opened anywhere in the vicinity of Baltimore to-night, I'm going to be held for the crime."

"I don't know what you're talking about, but I do know that we're wasting time. Give me that car, or I'll take my own——"

"Danny"—from her elevation on the running board Mary Elliot put her hands on the boy's shoulders and commanded his eyes—"once a man—the greatest man in the world—put his trust in me. I've been wondering why for ten years; wondering and weeping and wringing my hands, because I didn't know. But the answer came to me today. It came when Sally Mason phoned, and the world rocked under me, and then suddenly settled into a foundation for a plan. He trusted me because I am weak and Janice is strong. He knew that some day Janice was going to see that she had to take care of me, and that when she did she would find an outlet for the tremendous energies he left to her as his only direct legacy. I'm starting now, this minute, to be a terrible responsibility to Janice. I haven't been before—I've been simply a nuisance and an annoyance. She's been badly treated by me—Janice has. She's had so much strength, and nothing that mattered to spend it on. All my love and yearning went backward, to the man who had died. All his love, that she had ever heard about, was given to me. She's been an emotional step-child."

"I'll grant that. But how do you

think, in the little time this crisis allows to us——"

"Destruction! Wholesale destruction! All her world gone in a second, and a new one for her to build. I've been out to-day buying agents of destruction—everything from buckles for my shoes to an acetylene torch. The buckles are of platinum and rose diamonds, indicating great wealth, and calculated to shift the ground under Svarik's feet. The acetylene torch——"

"I don't know what you're talking about, and I can't wait to find out."

"No, we can't wait, can we? Better to go on, and find out the important part when we come to it. You'll drive, Danny?" She opened the forward door of the car and slid along the seat, leaving room for him under the steering wheel.

Spring had clad itself in velvet and silver under a clouded moon. The little car bored up the roads, disregarding the caution signs along the way, mounting the low summits, and flinging itself against the higher ones beyond, until at last with a vicious turn it shook the dust of the highway from its sturdy rear tires, and set nose angrily into the West Virginia mountains.

Neither of its passengers spoke. Mary Elliot's face was like the face of a child done in marble. Once she leaned forward and listened to the engine. Then she looked at Danny and he answered her unvoiced question with a grunt. The engine was all right. She blessed the car. She blessed the gas exploding against its pistons. She blessed the man, dead for ten years, who had laid down the road that curled and lengthened behind them.

The grade, weary of spiraling, shot upward into an acute angle. They might have been climbing the wall of a pyramid. Meadows and fields and honeysucked lanes retreated, and forests crowded up, huge and suspicious, to watch them as they passed. Mary

turned her face to the slim, bright path of sky above them.

"Is that noise wind in the trees," she asked, "or the echo of our engine?"

"Wind. It's blowing up a storm."

"They won't hear us coming. If there should be thunder, they won't even hear——" She didn't finish her sentence. With face lifted she watched the broken scraps of cloud that scuttled like rabbits across the path of the sky.

The first clap came as they mounted the final summit, paused for breath, switched off the dash light, which was the only illumination they had allowed themselves for miles, and eased onto the bridge spanning the chasm beyond which the Crow's Nest rose. Thunder echoes long in the mountains, and they had passed to the other side before the last reverberation died. High above them, as firm footed as a robber baron's fortress upon the butte which upheld it, the Crow's Nest was a shadow, lighted only as firelight from within played against a single battery of windows.

Under the eave of the butte where they had stopped Danny unhampered himself of his coat and clicked open the door. Swift as he was, Mary Elliot was through her door and blocking the way toward which he groped.

"Now!" she whispered, and then as the wind howled up from the valleys below she raised her voice to its overtone. "Now—in the back of the car—the torch——"

He pushed her away and felt for the stairs, cut somewhere in the granite of the butte. He found the first stair, but she was on the one above, clutching and pushing and crying him back.

"The torch—I'm telling you about the torch. Burn through the chains and let down the bridge. There's a screen around it to cut off the light."

He would have picked her up and set her out of the way, but she was a whirlwind of beating hands and repeated words, as surrounding as the storm.

"Mary—Mrs. Elliot—please!" Frantically he took to words as he clutched her hands down from his shoulders and groped for a way where she might not be. "Don't you understand. I've got to——"

"But the torch, Danny—the torch! Let down the bridge——"

"I think you're crazy. If you don't let me go, I'll——"

And then, all at once, he paused in the uneven fight she was giving him, and a question drilled toward her through the darkness. Her hands relinquished their hold, and her voice came clear at his ear.

"But it isn't how we'll all get back that's important," she shrieked. "It's how we're going to make them stay!" She spoke with conviction.

"Where is the thing?" he asked. "Where is the torch?"

A volley of thunder descended, split above the Crow's Nest, and bellowed away into the lowlands.

The work of the torch was swift. Crouching like a yeggman at the door of a treasure house, Danny applied the inferno of its point. Bit by bit, as link after link crystallized in its raw heat, the bridge sagged, its middle chains screeching with the new weight thrown upon them. And when at last the last strong hanger gave, and the structure dropped, to be yanked into half salvation by the steel tenacity of its middle chains, and held, swaying and crying in the darkness, twenty feet below her, Mary Elliot gripped her little fists until her nails cut into her palms.

High in the Crow's Nest, stretched in a chair before the fire, Siegfried congratulated himself that things were going very well indeed.

"Yes," he said in his too-perfect English, "when the storm passes we will go. That is, if the car will run."

"What do you mean—if the car will run?" Instantly rigid in the shelter of

a settle beside the chimney, Janice shot the question at him.

"I trust I mean—nothing. There was a knock in the engine those last few miles—a bare suggestion of a knock."

"Knock—your grandmother! She ran like a cash box on a wire. You can't pull any of——" Her words cut themselves off short. The brass base of a candlestick chattered on the chimney piece. A window rattled. Harsher than the crashing bass of the thunder, some cataclysm flung its vibrations against the stone walls of the house.

"What was that?" She had been sitting with her knees wrapped in her arms and her chin upon them. Now she put her feet to the floor and sat erect.

"Janice—come here, my Janice. A tree has fallen, perhaps. A rock has loosened and torn a channel for itself into the abyss. But what have such events to do with us—with you and me——"

The insidious domination of his voice scarcely brushed her ears. She went to the long line of windows fronting the room, and peered out, her hands hooding her eyes.

"Janice!" He did not move. He only called again.

"I tell you it wasn't a tree falling. I tell you—— Oh, my heavens! You don't suppose the bridge——"

"The bridge?" For a bare moment he stiffened, then relaxed, and a smile elongated the thin, long line of his lips. "And if it were the bridge?" he asked. "And you and I—alone—up close to the sun and the moon and the stars——"

"Cut out the mush. There's time for everything—and this isn't it. I tell you something's happened to the bridge." She wheeled away from the window. "Where's my coat? Get out of that chair—can't you?—and help me find my coat! I've got to go see what's up, and it's blowing a gale. Oh, God, don't let it be the bridge! Oh, God, make it

be something besides the bridge. What's that? 'Who's there?'

Frozen into a slim pillar of horror, she ceased her frantic search of the half-lighted room and stared at the door. It was opening, softly, surreptitiously. A hand fluttered around the casing and felt for the electric switch. Nothing happened. The plant in the basement was not working.

"But there's a light, Danny." It was her mother's voice, all puzzlement and tremor. "I thought a night light must have been left burning somehow. I don't understand those things and I thought somehow— Oh, my gracious!" Mary Elliot came through the door and attempted ineffectually to back out of it again. "Janice!"

"Mother!" The two syllables were a blaze of wrath. "So—you followed me, did you? You followed me and thought that I— Well, I'll tell you your labor's wasted. I'll do as I please and with whom I please, and you—"

"But, Janice, I didn't follow you. I—I—" Backing against the wall for support, Mary Elliot cowered in velvet and chinchilla and jewels and shining hair and shamed, suffused prettiness—the very type and symbol of feminine folly revealed and brought to dock. "I—you see Danny and I just went for a ride—and we drove farther than we should have done—and a storm was coming up—and I said to Danny we could go to the Crow's Nest till it blew over—and we did—and just after we'd crossed it, the bridge went down—and now we're—"

"You!" Janice did not hear the minor item about the bridge. "You—out on a petting party! You—my father's wife—out with a kid—all dressed up like— How long, I'd like to know, has this sort of thing been going on?"

Behind the screening chair Siegfried Svarik got to his feet. The smile had shortened again on his lips, and the

sharp blue of his eyes had dulled to ugly opacity. But as his glance fell upon the intruder, calculating with swift accuracy the richness of her dress, the value of her jewels, the silliness of her beauty, his accustomed suavity returned.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Elliot, perhaps if I—"

"Oh, Mr. Svarik. I am so glad!" With a little, cooing cry she flew to him and caught at his hands. "You won't let her scold me any more, will you? Children are so hard. They think that just because we—"

"Mother!" Janice advanced like a stalking Nemesis. Mary Elliot cuddled her furs and her jewels and her shining head against her protector.

"Well, you are hard, Janice. You know you are. You think because I'm your mother I'm as old as the hills. But even the hills in the Bible skipped about and had a little fun, didn't they, Mr. Svarik? And I was only sixteen when I married and never had any girlhood, and Janice is barely eighteen now"—she looked up at the calculating face above her—"so I'm not Mrs. Methusalem, after all, am I, Mr. Svarik?"

"I think you are the nymph Io," he began, and, bending over her, smiled into her eyes.

"Oh, for gosh sakes!" Janice kicked at a stool and sent it scuttering across the floor. Mary Elliot paid no heed to the unsympathetic interruption.

"The nymph Io!" She was looking into the eyes above her, her two hands caught like homing birds in those of the man. "She was followed by a gadfly, wasn't she? How clever you are, Mr. Svarik, to think of that, because Janice is a sort of gadfly. You've no idea how she torments me and how afraid of her I am. I have to take all my simple little pleasures when she's not around, just because she—"

"Danny!" Janice was back at the door again, calling into the inky dark of the hallway. "Danny, come here!"

Her tone was peremptory enough to command a legion, but only silence answered to her call.

"I think he's gone, dear." Warmed by the fire and by the half embrace in which she was held, Mary Elliot's voice became a pur. "You may find him in the engine room or out by the car. At the first word you spoke he turned and ran. She's so hard, Mr. Svarik. You've no idea how hard she is. She frightens every one—even Danny—even me. That's why I've kept all the money. I'm adaptable and easy-going. But, if she had it, she'd tie it up in perfect knots so that nobody could get a cent. She'd be like nails about her money. I'm not that way. I think that some fine, strong man ought——"

"I wouldn't talk to Mr. Svarik about money, if I were you." Janice had given up the unresponsive hallway and crumpled into a chair. She looked young and slender and very pathetic, her tense figure broken to the curve of the chair, her hands limp in her lap. Only her eyes were alive and ferocious.

"But he's interested." The innocence of Mary's face belied the double meaning of the words. "Americans always do talk about their money, and foreigners always are interested—aren't they, Mr. Svarik? They look upon our fortunes as our most amusing characteristic. It's so quaint of us to have so much money and so little of everything else. And I've always said—— But where are you going, Janice?"

Wearily, agedly the child had got from her chair and was stumbling toward the door. If it hadn't contradicted all precedent, Mary would have sworn that the turned back was presented as a shield for tears.

"I'm going to find Danny." An undeniable snuffle smudged the final word. "If Danny won't come to me, I'll go to Danny." And she went.

Sighing contentedly, patting the perfect waves of her hair, Mary Elliot

dropped the luxurious weight of her coat and sank onto a low, backless seat. The firelight splintered against the stones in her comb, the great, flat jewel on her breast, the frosted buckles of her shoes. The storm had howled itself into a silence as sudden and deafening as its rise.

"Now," said Mary, "we could go home, if the bridge hadn't fallen in."

Siegfried Svarik crooked one elbow on the shelf above the fire and commanded the muscles of his face into brooding admiration. There was no needless subtlety about the woman who smiled up at him. She wore no ambiguous amber or jade or lapis lazuli to confuse the hunter and awaken doubts. There was nothing there but simple, unvarnished wealth, not badly displayed on helplessness.

"I am grateful to the bridge," he said in his well-clipped English. "I am very grateful to the bridge for falling in."

It was upon Janice that the full weight, not only of the calamity, but of the drudgery attendant upon the calamity, descended. There would have been no blankets at all that night if she had not rummaged them out of cedar chests in the storeroom and piled them on Danny's arms and spread them on the beds. There would have been no fires in the morning if she had not discovered a lantern and by its light searched out the fuel room, and directed Danny to the proper laying of kindling and heavy wood in the kitchen range, ready for the match applied at dawn. There would have been no breakfast if the storeroom had not yielded coffee and meal and canned milk and sugar and tinned fruit to her explorations. And there would have been no breakfast eaten at all if she had not risen and labored and knocked at doors and stormed and cajoled and finally wept when the slothful ones disregarded her summons.

Danny was the first to come down, looking sheepishly handsome in his untimely expanse of shirt front.

"I don't see what you got up in the middle of the night for," he said, looking unappreciatively at the majesty of the morning spread out below. "As far as we can see we've got the rest of our lives to put in up here, and the more we sleep the shorter they'll seem."

"Somebody might come along—some hunter or something. I thought you might run up a flag of distress from the top of the house."

"I might," said Danny, "but it won't do any good." His tone was lugubrious. "What you got for breakfast, now I'm here?"

She put corn cakes and coffee before him, and was returning to the sputtering griddle again when there came a swirl and a cry at the doorway and Mary Elliot, in full regalia, flashed her way into the room.

"I knocked at Siegfried's door and ran!" She was all flutter and giggles and high, excited loquacity. "Hear him! He's coming down the stairs after me three at a time, and getting lost in the halls. Janice, dear, I've never known such a fascinating man. I don't blame you a bit for trying to keep him away from me, but now that I've met Siegfried——"

"Siegfried?" Janice launched the word with the full force of an indictment, her pancake turner lifted at the angle of utmost horror and accusation.

"Yes! I call him Siegfried and he calls me Mimi. Isn't that sweet? I've always wanted to be called something like Mimi or Tata or Kitten, and now Siegfried——"

"Aren't you ashamed? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? You—a woman once honored by the love of a man like my father, to——"

"But Siegfried and I are awfully well acquainted. Really we are. We talked and talked last night while you went

fussing around the house. And this morning we're——"

"Danny!" The pancake turner cut an arc through the air, skidded across a table by the sink and clanged down to the floor. "Leave your coffee and come out where I can talk to you. Something's got to be done."

He followed the frantic, driven little figure as it flew ahead of him, down the long, steep steps hewn in the butte, out over the shelf of rock on which the great car with the coronets on its panels and the little car with the dust on its wheels stood side by side, and clutched out at her in sudden, anguished fright when she came at last to the edge of the abyss below which, tantalizingly near and sickeningly far, the bridge still hung and swayed on its central chains.

"Oh, I won't jump off." She swung around angrily, but her face was a twisting mask of pitiful suffering. "Who'd look after her if I took the easy way out?"

"But, Janice, if you really care for him, and tell her so, she'll——"

"Care for him? Care for that? Oh, my gosh, has he got you fooled, too? He's bogus, I tell you. Bogus! He's after her money and he'll get it, and when he's got it he'll neglect her and mistreat her and break her heart. I don't care about the money. Damn the money! But she's my mother, and she's little and innocent and defenseless and sweet and silly, and there's nobody in the world to look after her but me. I never saw it that way before, but since I've been up here, it's as though I looked at her the way my father did and saw her as he saw her. I've seen myself, too, since last night, and I'm none too proud of what's shown up. But we can't waste time talking about all that now. We've got to think up a way to get her out of this place and down——"

"What good will that do? If we can get out, Svarik can, too."

"But it will be different once I get her down home. I haven't been much company before, but now I will be. I'll keep him away and think up other things to interest her. We might even go off on a trip together—just the two of us; some place where he couldn't find out and follow. I'd love it—getting away from all the jazz and petting and dancing and racing around. I'm so tired, Danny—you don't know how tired I am. I'm living on my nerve. I'm nothing else but nerve and a screaming, laughing voice. Sometimes I stop and listen to myself, screeching and carrying on, and it makes me so sorry for myself, Danny—so sorry for myself that I could die."

His hands were hard with work in the out-of-doors, but no mother's palms were ever more tender than those he cupped about her face as he looked into her eyes.

"And how about me, Janice? If you've been sorry for yourself—how about me? No, don't answer now. Listen to what I've got to say. Last night, just after I came to this place, I went down in the pump room. Your father put in an engine there that is strong enough to raise a ship, and

there's tackle enough lying around loose to pull a train. A little good rope thrown out to catch the stringers of that bridge, and the engine in the pump room can be rigged up to do the rest. Once the thing is hoisted into place we can cross over on foot like a flock of refugees, and send back workmen to make permanent repairs and bring down the cars. Then you and your mother——"

"Danny, if you'll do all that, I'll——"

"No, you don't, missy! You don't tie yourself up to any bargain just because you're hysterical and grateful and goodness knows what. You're going back over that bridge and down to your home, scot free to do exactly as you please in the matter of Danny Shot-over."

"But, Danny, it isn't hysterics nor gratitude nor goodness knows what! It's always been that way with me, only I didn't see it until I came up here—just as I didn't see how it was with mother. And Danny, when we go away, mother and I—couldn't you come and join us? Couldn't you? And we'd——"

She never managed to say the rest. Somehow the words got crushed back upon her mouth.



I NEVER LOVED YOU

I NEVER loved you; yea, I swear 'tis so,
 Though once I knelt and drank the bitter wine
 Of adoration at your flowered shrine,
 And in the white dust laid my proud head low.
 I loved, perhaps, your hands, your mouth, your hair,
 Or loved some hour that I spent with you;
 If I said otherwise, it was untrue.
 See now with what a calm, indifferent air
 I lift the faded laurel from your head,
 And fold the altar cloth, and put away
 The kneeling block whereon I knelt to pray,
 And go my way with reluctant tread,
 Bearing no shabby relic you have blessed,
 Nor any tender memory in my breast.

HELENE MULLINS.



Le Cygne d'Or

By Grace Stair

Author of "Playing up to Hoytie,"
"A Widow's Might," etc.

SURROUNDED on the station platform by a litter of bags and hand luggage stamped with legends of her recent activities in Paris, Cairo, Singapore, Hongkong and Yokohama, Hoytie Emden took a moment to look around for the young Carsons. Without being too conceited, Hoytie had had an idea that her return from a year of wandering around the world would bring her little cousin Valerie away from her pleasures long enough to meet the train.

Through the crowds moving toward the station, she saw a man's figure coming rapidly toward her, his open overcoat flapping against his legs.

"Hello, Teddy!" Hoytie called cheerily, giving him both her slim, gloved hands outstretched in greeting. "My, but it's good to see my 'famby' again—or part of it! Wouldn't they let you bring Valerie through the gates? A high-handed outrage!"

Ted Carson kissed his wife's cousin on both cheeks, and was about to answer when Hoytie turned back to the red caps. Then, with the caravan set in motion, Hoytie had time for renewed inquiries about affairs at home, and Valerie, particularly.

"Well, you needn't expect to find her waiting outside the gate," exploded Ted, with no attempt to conceal his exasperation. "She's probably dancing her head off at some darned pink tea. She's forgotten all about train time and her prom-

ise to meet me here. I guess mother was right when she said the other day that Valerie wouldn't even be coming home to eat or sleep, if I didn't soon curb this desire of hers."

Hoytie's most tinkling laughter sounded a sharp, clear note through the gloom of the train shed.

"Oh, Teddy, my dear! That's delicious! I can't doubt now that I've come home! It's just like old times! When *will* you and the rest of the Carsons ever learn that Valerie's little preferences don't mean a thing? Why, she can't help having them, poor baby! It's just our great-grandfather Hoyt coming out in her, that's all. Of course I suppose we've all helped to spoil her."

"Whoever's been doing it has jolly well succeeded," observed Ted gloomily. "I'd call the result just common garden selfishness. But something's got to be done, Hoytie. And I'm glad you've come home. Maybe you can get her interested again in some kind of normal routine."

"Oh, ye gods!" groaned Hoytie. Over her shoulder as they slipped through the gate, she said: "Routine! You don't expect any woman to be crazy about living by rule, do you? And as for a 'normal routine!' Oh, Teddy! You talk like a Roger Babson report crossed with an efficiency expert's chart of the perfect office."

Five o'clock was frequently a crowded

hour at the Hyacinthe Club, around the corner from Park Avenue on one of the side streets not too far uptown. Prohibition had not robbed the cocktail hour of its fascination. The rather limited dancing space was packed with men and girls snatching a bit of diversion before time to dress for dinner.

"We are to dance this one, surely?" inquired a strikingly featured man who leaned forward at one of the little square tables to clasp the hand of his companion. Golden-bronze hair that pushed back in deep waves from his smooth forehead made his brown eyes strangely innocent in expression.

Across the table there were great, dark eyes looking into his with an intensity that was almost physical. Watching the girl, and speculating with a curiously detached segment of his brain, the man thought how much the soft, faded green of her dress, and its stripes of tawny leopard fur on collar and pockets, seemed the color of a pictured garden where only big, black pansies grew, velvety and tender, like her eyes. He could feel, with his delicate, foreign sensitivity, how this girl wanted to drench her spirit with the elusive charm of his personality.

To his question she had given no answer in words, merely rising from her place with languid eagerness, so that she seemed floating up from some emotional depth into his waiting arms.

"But you must remind me when it is half past five," she whispered. "To-day it is that I suffer in the name of duty. You remember that my cousin is returning this afternoon?"

"Ah, yes; and the good little Valerie is to meet the train." His strong arm about her waist tightened imperceptibly—a gentle, mocking pressure that seemed prophetic of the words which followed—a gentle, mocking murmur: "But will she? And is there no first duty to me?"

"Devotion to you, *Cygne d'Or*—my golden swan; but not duty. I know I

promised to have dinner with you to-night, but I'd forgotten that I had to be filial. And Heaven knows I'm that very little of the time." Valerie had fallen into the morbid introspection which wanders hand in hand with vagabond affection.

"Well, we've a dance or two left," remarked the man, deliberately indifferent, cruelly aware that she suffered because he did not urge her further to stay. But he was far more subtle than that, she should soon know.

Where the moments had gone, or how many times they circled the dancing floor, Valerie did not count. But during one of the intermissions when they returned to their table she glanced about, only to see that many of the couples had already left.

"Oh, the time! What have you?" she asked her companion breathlessly. "It must be after five thirty."

Slowly drawing out his watch, his brown eyes dropped at last from faintly amused contemplation of her alarm to regard the hour.

"You are right. It is ten minutes of six." His smile was a passing reflection of that sardonic gleam.

"Oh!" gasped Valerie with soft fervency. "Now I'll be in for it. Ditching the only member of my own family left! Though I guess I——"

"You guess you'll have dinner with me, after all?" he suggested, interrupting her gently. "Didn't you know I wanted you all the time?" Again he reached across the table for the despairing little hand that lay limply on the white cloth like a wilted flower.

Her eyes were wide with bravely simulated indignation.

"I believe you've done this purposely," she accused him slowly.

"Well"—a shrug of his shoulders—"and if I did? Don't you want to go as much as I want to have you?" He smiled mischievously, like a little boy. "It's always so much nicer to meet one's

relatives after they've freshened up a bit. Traveling puts one in such a temper. Only you wouldn't look a frump, not even at the end of a long journey. One of those long journeys I've imagined we might take some day." His hand released hers and slipped slowly away, as the surrendering smile for which he had been playing dawned radiantly in her eyes and about the warm, red curl of her lips.

Even in the cluttered state of her apartment, Hoytie might have believed that she had never been away at all; once more she was caught up with the news of her familiar world. At the very outset of her travels, when she had planned to spend a major part of the year in the south of France, something had occurred which very nearly destroyed Hoytie's illusions regarding her own protective powers. A seasoned trader, in hearts, accustomed to taking more than she gave, she had met a dealer in the same commodity, of the other sex, who had come close to cheating her at her own game. The end of the affair had resulted in a complete change of plan, which sent the experienced Hoytie on her way, encased in the armor of a new cynicism. For that reason she had welcomed the return to diversions of society at home, which were at their winter peak when she reached New York.

But this news of young Valerie was not reassuring, especially in the light of Hoytie's own maladroitness. And she feared there could be no doubt about Valerie! Within a short space of hours, Hoytie had been informed by no less than three of her most intimate friends that Valerie Carson was head over heels in a violent love affair—she whose married life had heretofore retained the charm of her early romance. Now it seemed that Valerie was bent upon cutting away from the conservative Ted; she had a latchkey of her own, which,

rumor said, was all too frequently being inserted in the door of their smart apartment at scandalously early hours of the morning.

Hoytie's own state of mind was dangerously near complete approval of such details of emancipation as latchkeys for women; but when this freedom threatened the domestic integrity of one she held dear, it was time to stop for reflection. Hoytie was obliged to acknowledge that this present difficulty seemed even more serious than the escapes from which she had hitherto helped to extricate Valerie. It was one thing to have motored sixty miles into the countryside after midnight to rescue a palpitating débutante who had suddenly changed her mind in the middle of an elopement; but to find a young matron giving every indication of the erstwhile bud's instability of affection proved highly disquieting. Hoytie knew now why there had been no Cousin Valerie to greet her at the station.

"Well, hello there, Hoytie, you old globe-trotter!" The voice which answered Hoytie's telephone call the next morning drawled sleepily. "Wasn't it rotten for me to have left my beastly little watch at home yesterday? Ted's furious about it, and I'm simply too chagrined for words."

Not sufficiently chagrined to have awakened early enough to have called me first, thought Hoytie parenthetically.

"Are you going to be the angel you always are, and forgive me, Hoytie, dear?" Now it was a mournful voice that matched the familiar, pouting droop of Valerie's lips. Hoytie recalled this tone, which meant that concessions were in order, sooner or later.

The old loyalty was strong as ever, despite a faint irritation at Valerie's theatrical employment of her own powerful self-pity.

"Don't try to wheedle me, child!" commanded Hoytie in ironic amusement. "You know perfectly that I'm still the

soft old cousin who's here for you to fall back on whenever you need me! . . . Check your guilty conscience, Valerie, my own! I only called to invite you over here for luncheon. The apartment is a mess, but you won't mind. I'm dying to see you. . . . If you'll shut your eyes to the state of my domain, I'll turn the other cheek to you."

Valerie was simply desolated, she said, but she had an engagement for luncheon; something she couldn't possibly break. Hoytie was too wise to put her questioning thought into words. No, she couldn't come to dinner that night with Ted, either; they were going to the Boltons'. A moment's pause, then Valerie broke in with an invitation of her own.

"I'll tell you what, Hoytie. Meet me at the Forty Club about eleven o'clock, can't you? Ted always plays duplicate whist with Sam Bolton. He'd never think of taking me to the Forty Club dance to-night, but I'm going anyway."

"Who is taking you?" inquired Hoytie.

"No one. We'll have an escort after we get there, all right. Just leave that to me."

"Are you sure I won't be interfering with a party you've already arranged?" prodded Hoytie. "We can see each other some other time." In reality Hoytie was ready to make an engagement with Valerie on any terms. She felt that she could do nothing without Valerie's version of her alleged romance.

"Some other time?" caroled Valerie. "I should say not! Not at all 'some other time.' What an idea! I'm determined to see you as soon as I can." For Valerie was secretly elated at the chance to take Hoytie with her to the club. Perhaps their appearance together would silence the tabbies. It was the psychological moment for just such reinforcements for Valerie, who realized that she had possibly been indiscreet in

her persistent attendance at the Forty Club dances, unaccompanied.

That night Hoytie reached the club some few minutes before her cousin, just when the great, shaded lamps had been dimmed for one of the special dances. When the number was finished, Hoytie was ushered to Mrs. Carson's table, while the amber lamps blazed again as if fanned into flame by the applause.

Suddenly, before Hoytie could exchange more than a nod or a smile with her friends, before any one of the men she knew could excuse himself and come to greet her, she was astonished to see the exhibition dancer leave his professional partner and make his way toward her table. She had not time, even, for the flashing thought that this man might expect to find her cousin Valerie waiting there.

Hoytie was staring with wide, blue eyes at the approaching figure, suave and slim as he had ever been in the black and white of his dinner clothes. The sunny, golden hair rippled in the same beautiful waves; the deep brown eyes were as cherubic as on that first day when Hoytie had come upon him practicing a rhythmic, sensuous dance all alone on a little sheltered plateau high above the blue water of the Mediterranean. Here was the very knight of hearts from whom Hoytie herself had fled, counting discretion the better part of valor. It came back to her so vividly; all the beauty of those days that had been his to give; all the beauty he had spoiled so utterly in the giving.

"You!" Her voice, cold and chill, lent a stern dignity which hid her dismay.

He bowed low before her to hide the confusion growing in his own eyes, and stammered:

"Madame! I did not come to this table because I recognized you. I had expected to find—" But it seemed impossible for him to go on. He

stopped, looked once into her eyes, then glanced as furtively away. At last, having regained a measure of his assurance and impudence, he continued: "You would understand how I am too sure an artist ever to seek the renewal of an old romance."

"Old romance!" Hoytie replied in a sternly mocking tone. "Play acting, you mean!" The vision of blue water and dancing sunlight swam before her eyes in a blinding revelation. Those other days, in their glorious setting, had woven themselves into a spangled net to trap her, Hoytie, the trapper. But these things are kismet, and one only finds out all about them just when any knowledge comes too late.

The dancer shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"Well, play acting or romance! Whichever you like!" But he remembered how little like either had been the unpleasant end of their affair on that afternoon when Hoytie had forced him to confess that during all their days together he had been married to the première danseuse of his harvest ballet. It had been that same harvest ballet which Hoytie had helped him to organize and finance, which had won for him the engagement to dance in Paris, and thus in turn had brought about the end. For Hoytie had heard some gossip about the ballerina and had demanded her dismissal before the little company went to Paris. Then it was that, for all Hoytie's financial preëminence, he had defied her. The ballerina would go with them, because—she was his wife!

He was about to bow once more and turn away, when the lithe figure of Valerie Carson, dark haired and glowing in a crimson velvet gown, came toward them. Fastened high on one shoulder a diamond butterfly, her only ornament, sparkled and gleamed.

Instantly the man's face lighted with an emotion more joyous—the same bright eagerness with which he had

turned from his graceful maneuvers to welcome Hoytie's intrusion on that memorable first afternoon on the plateau above Cannes, before fame had beckoned him with her golden finger. Watching him, Hoytie felt again the wild, disturbing sweetness of those moments when he had first wheeled about on the flower-starred grass to smile at her. She could even remember the clothes he had worn—the black trousers fastened about his waist with a striped silk sash, and the thin cotton shirt open at his beautiful throat to all the errant little winds of heaven.

Just at that very moment the music began again.

"Hello, Hoytie, you darling! I *am* glad to see you, and I'm *so* sorry I wasn't here first. But Ted was impossible to-night. He insisted on having me stay for some bridge, until I thought I should go mad." Valerie's dark eyes appraised Hoytie's black gown, the smoothly coiffed yellow hair, the flawless complexion dominated by the periwinkle-blue eyes. "You're looking awfully fit, dear!" she added, with a pecking kiss at the smooth cheek. Valerie seemed excited, eager, too, as she looked toward the dancer whose patience, as he watched her, was marked by such superb confidence.

"I hope you haven't languished, waiting for me," Valerie concluded, laughing nervously. She paused a moment waiting for Hoytie to speak. Then she smiled into the searching brown eyes bent upon her. "Mon Cygne d'Or," she whispered, rather than spoke, utterly forgetful of Hoytie, whose eyes were now upon her in consternation.

Hoytie realized with a terrific shock of surprise and a curiously dull pain at her heart that this must be the man who was responsible for the scandal involving her little cousin. She rose to her feet, gathering her wrap around her shoulders, her face a mask of stern displeasure. Valerie sensed rather than

saw the movement, and, reaching out her hand blindly, touched Hoytie's arm. Breathlessly she said:

"Oh, I say, Hoytie, excuse me. Mrs. Emden—Le Cygne d'Or! My cousin, you know, has just returned from a trip around the world. She admires dancing. She came here to-night especially to see you dance." It was rather pitiful, in the light of Hoytie's sudden, intuitive knowledge, to have Valerie chatter on so desperately.

"You won't go, will you, dear?" Valerie said, as she turned to face her cousin, her eyes soft and pleading.

"I am honored to meet you, madame," said the dancer, in this interval, wondering what Hoytie would do. His coldly smiling eyes challenged her to give battle, even though he knew that she had yet to repay him for the significant photograph of himself and his wife, which he had sent to Hoytie from Paris with a mocking inscription of friendship, as a memento.

Hoytie felt the irony of his smiling bow, and was blinded by thoughts of golden, burning hours that sickened her now, as she strove to reconcile the warring elements of sense and spirit. But her strange, fiery recklessness made her accept the challenge. It would take a clever woman to manage a fool.

Now it was time for another special dance with the woman professional, so Le Cygne d'Or was obliged to leave Valerie and Hoytie together. He was not without some apprehension of danger from the possibility of indiscreet allusions.

"I am so attired in wonder, Valerie, that I can't be polite," said Hoytie. "Tell me, how long have you known this man, and wherever did you meet him?" Her eyes were innocently fixed on Valerie, sipping a glass of "Widow Cliquot." "You know, Val, my dear, that I think it's too utterly wonderful for words to have come home and found the Carsons all agog over the latest gos-

sip in their midst. Why don't you give me the low-down on all this scandal I've been hearing? It will be ever so much more entertaining than for me to hold forth on the number of Buddhas I've seen, or the quantity of temple steps I've climbed—and to which, incidentally, I attribute the present svelte lines of me 'figger.' They're better than a diet of eggs and raw potatoes. But come on, now, what's the scandal—and is it all true?" Under this gay badinage she was hiding her real trepidation.

Valerie had bristled resentfully during this prologue.

"Whether all what scandal is true? How should I know the horrid particulars of a lot of gossip?"

At this Hoytie's eyebrows lifted ever so faintly.

"So! This Cygne d'Or, as you call him so poetically, is the man? I hadn't been told any of the details. I didn't know." She was silent, reflecting, until she exclaimed in thoughtful reproach: "You, having an affair with a dancer! Poor Val!" A rush of maternal feeling for this little girl deepened her tone, with the certainty that this situation was not to be dealt with lightly.

"You needn't say 'poor Val,' Hoytie. The whole town has been crazy over him, since his arrival two months ago. Other women are simply jealous because he prefers to dance with me. You know Ted isn't interested in any of the things that appeal to me, so why shouldn't I find something with which to amuse myself when he leaves me alone so much, playing golf, or staying for hours on end in his laboratory at the plant? For Heaven's sake, don't *you* be insufferable, too, Hoytie—after I'd counted on your understanding!"

"But, Val, what do you know of his history? You're playing with fire!"

"Is it so necessary to have his pedigree? He has had wonderful success in Paris—that's all I know."

"You don't know, then, that this

dancing partner of his is really his wife?" The insinuating question was Hoytie's last hope, founded on faith in the pride she knew to be inherent in Valerie as it was in herself.

"Of course not. Neither does any one else. He's never been married." Valerie was utterly unmoved.

"Oh, he's told you that himself, I suppose?" Hoytie wondered what her cousin would say if she could see a certain photograph in her possession, could read its revealing inscription.

"Don't be sarcastic, Hoytie!" cried Valerie. "Anyway, it wouldn't matter to me if he was married. If I wanted him, I'd take him—never fear."

Hoytie looked at her a long moment. "I believe you! I think you would do just that." But she did not add how she saw clearly for the first time that the shallowness of Valerie's nature had left her defenseless. How very much without defense she looked even now, gazing beyond Hoytie toward the aisle along which Le Cygne d'Or was returning to their table! There was no need for further comment. But Hoytie took particular care to make it impossible for the man she knew as Jules Leru to refuse to dance with her, instead of Valerie. Then, once out on the floor, she made clear her intentions.

"Even if I have to tell little Valerie of our episode, I shall make certain tonight that she knows what sort of man you really are," she said definitely. "Months ago when we were in the Midi you used to tell me that you would live in your memories. And the memory of the opportunity I gave you with the 'Ballet of the Reaper' should make you willing to do as I ask."

He interrupted arrogantly, holding her away from him to look into her eyes.

"I suppose, now you've returned to find me a success in your own country, as well as in Paris, you'll take good care not to let me forget whose money

started me on my career at Cannes. At the same time, I seem to remember that you allowed the impression that you were furnishing the costumes and setting for the ballet as your gift to the charity."

"My motive all through was philanthropic, Jules." Her lips curled in derisive impudence. "Whatever I might have given you would have been a charity."

At this he laughed immoderately.

"Your philanthropy was so strangely like another emotion during our small love affair, that I laugh now to hear of it in so cold a guise."

Her mood changed instantly, as she replied in a frigid tone: "I merely wish to make it plain that you must leave my cousin, Mrs. Carson, alone. For unless you force your attentions, she will never give you another thought."

Now she had touched the vulnerable spot of his egotism. "A declaration of interference, eh?" he answered harshly. "Then you've forgotten the letters you wrote during the first weeks of our little friendship? Perhaps little Valerie would not think I was the pursuer, if she could read some of their sentences." He paused provocatively as if in thought, to continue, "*For example*—this one: 'I am thinking constantly of you and our plan. I, who have discovered you, feel as though you were mine alone. Yet I suppose I must share you with the world.'"

"Your memory seems well-trained," agreed Hoytie gallantly, in spite of the quick constriction of her heart. "So you've turned blackmailer since I saw you last?" she taunted.

"Ah-h! That, my dear Hoytie, is an ugly term. Fortunately, however, I am in a happy humor at seeing you once again, so that I will gladly overlook your little extravagances of speech."

"Don't forget, Jules, that I have a little memento of yours that I might show Valerie."

"So?" he questioned softly, gently, to match her tone. "A faded rose, perhaps? Or that small brown book of poems? It was I, Hoytie, who discovered what a sentimentalist you are at heart," he boasted.

To herself Hoytie smiled grimly. He would soon see whether she was sentimental, or practical; whether she was afraid to disillusion her cousin or not.

They danced on, silently now—Hoytie realizing that to argue or plead with this man would do no good.

The Forty Club was brilliant that night with a company that drew its forces from the circles of talent—writers, actors, financiers. The ornaments of the richly appareled seemed even more dazzling in contrast to the statuesque calm of some well-known beauty whose loveliness scorned the artifices of such adornments.

When Leru and his professional partner, Mademoiselle le Motte, had finished their special dance, the floor was again filled with the waiting guests. Hoytie danced several times with friends who were delighted to see her again.

In an interval, Hoytie's partner brought her back to her cousin's table where Valerie and Le Cygne d'Or sat talking. Jules rose as she approached, and for a moment or two Hoytie stood between them, her right hand laid fondly on Valerie's shoulder, her fingers touching the gorgeous diamond butterfly fastened there.

As the music began again, Hoytie looked up at Jules.

"You're dancing this with me, aren't you?"

Although he hesitated, murmuring an excuse, Hoytie smiled in her most alluring manner.

"Oh, no! Come along, my dear! We are to have this one for old time's sake. Who knows but what it may be our last?"

Some one else was standing beside

Valerie, waiting to take her out on the floor; but she sat motionless, her thoughts seeking beneath the beaming radiance of her relative—a strangely feverish concentration that appeared to possess Hoytie—the reason for this volte-face.

But Le Cygne d'Or, dancing now with Hoytie in his arms, felt the recurrence of her old attraction. It thrilled him as it never had before to move to the rhythm of her perfect poise and balance. She seemed to have surrendered completely, making no attempt even to speak, though on her face was the old fascinating, inscrutable smile.

They were at a far corner of the room, near a little corridor, when Hoytie stopped on the pretense of having caught her heel in the lace of her gown.

"Do you mind coming with me while I fix this?" she asked. "The manager's private office is right here, isn't it? With you I could go in there all right?"

"Of course," agreed Jules, smiling to himself at the thinly veiled excuse. She had learned new coquetries, this Hoytie Emden. Even she had grown more proficient in the art of flattery, intriguing to get him to herself.

Once inside the small room, paneled chastely in Circassian walnut, with a small Italian desk in dark wood its only concession to a commercial purpose, Hoytie saw that the office was unoccupied.

"Put on the desk light, will you, please, Jules?" she said, remaining by the door.

He heard the faint click of a key in the lock, as he whirled on his heel in time to see Hoytie drop the key in her bodice. The desk was between them as she came forward, puzzling him a trifle, wondering why the reckless Hoytie took such extraordinary precautions to insure their privacy. But it was not for him to make the first advance.

When she picked up the telephone that lay cradled in its rack, Jules smiled

quizzically. Not even when he heard her ask for the manager was his composure disturbed.

"If you want a drink, Hoytie, I could have arranged that," he said, frankly laughing at her. "But I didn't think you'd stage such a party."

"No, my friend! Nor did I! But you will gradually come to see how much I am a creature of impulse." Hoytie talked once more into the phone, asking the girl to send the manager to his private office immediately on a matter of gravest importance.

"Why are you so mysterious, Hoytie?" he asked finally. "I think you'd better unlock the door. I don't know what this pretense of yours means; and, anyway, I'm due on the floor in a few minutes."

She made no reply. They stood waiting, looking steadily at each other. Then the door knob rattled. Hoytie responded, calling: "Just a moment!" Swiftly she withdrew the key, and unlocked the door to admit the startled manager. Jules had stepped forward, as if to leave; but she shut the door in his face.

"Not so fast; not so fast!"

Before the astonished manager could speak, Hoytie said quietly:

"Albert, I insist that you search this man."

The manager looked intently from her to the dancer's face.

"Search him? Search Leru? Why, Mrs. Emden——"

Jules was startled now, ready to put up a fight. He had cried: "Hoytie!" at hearing her request; but she had only glanced at him with infinite contempt.

"Don't stop to ask for reasons, Albert! Do as I say! I tell you that, if you search this man, you will find something of value that does not belong to him."

Now Jules' face went livid. He glared at Albert, who was declaring reluctantly:

"If you insist, Mrs. Emden! If you will take the consequences!"

But when the manager came near enough to touch him, Jules' fist shot out, aimed for the older man's jaw. Albert ducked quickly, and leaped upon the dancer, whose arm was soon pinioned behind him. In spite of his years and the gray of hair and beard, Albert could still practice a trick or two. Le Cygne d'Or could only writhe helplessly in the relentless hold upon him, as Albert went deftly through his pockets.

At last a gleam brightened the manager's eyes as his fingers closed over a hard object and he drew out a diamond pin. He was aghast as he stammered:

"You, a thief?"

Jules made no answer, but looked at Hoytie with a baleful glance.

Then Hoytie addressed Albert, who had shoved the discomfited Jules into a chair and now stood guard over him, armed with a little revolver hurriedly snatched from the desk drawer. Inversely as the manager was worrying over the possibility of scandal and harm to himself and the club's reputation, Hoytie's spirits were rising with the realization that her coup d'état was working out better than even she had supposed possible.

"You mustn't worry, Albert. Nothing will happen to you or the Forty Club, if our clever friend here will just write a little paper for me. His swan song, one might almost say, apologizing for the pun." Pointing to the desk, she added, "Here are paper and ink."

Sullenly Jules looked at her, taking the measure of her insistence.

"Sit down here, Jules, if you please, and write as I dictate!" Hoytie's voice was controlled, steady and low; but something of her determination warned the dancer to obedience. He sat stiffly before the desk, forming every word reluctantly, conscious that Hoytie had won.

Turning to Albert, involuntary wit-

ness to the scene, involuntarily in possession of the little tale Hoytie had dictated, she said:

"Better than any one else in New York I know the background and characteristics of this man so delightfully christened *Le Cygne d'Or*—the golden swan. I had requested him to cease his attentions to my little cousin, and he defied me. But now I feel that there will be no more trouble.

"I might also add for your enlightenment, Albert, that it was I who unfastened this pin from the shoulder of my cousin, Mrs. Carson. I was obliged

to frighten out of him this confession." Hoytie was indifferent to the hate that blazed in Jules' eyes.

A quarter of an hour later, when Hoytie had rejoined her cousin, there was an announcement from the floor. The manager was reporting that a piece of jewelry had been found, and might be recovered by application at his office.

"Why, Valerie! Look at your shoulder! Your diamond butterfly's gone! Hadn't you even missed it, you careless child?" cried Hoytie in excitement that needed no simulation.



NOT content with her usual adornments, the mermaid of the beaches is in the "swim" with bathing jewelry of colored hard rubber to match any costume. Earrings, bracelets, and necklaces of coral, jade, blue, or orange brighten her sea costume.



HUNTING the "beaveress" has supplanted the game of "beaver" in Paris, where the mademoiselles promenade the boulevards discovering, if they can, unbobbed heads. Beards are so plentiful in France that the game of "beaver" has no longer any zest. But long-haired ladies—ah! they are scarce indeed.



"LADIES with bobbed hair, please do not remove your hats," decrees a Paris theater, reversing the rule of ages. The modish cloche type of hat is much less obstructive than the fluffy balloonlike coiffure when released from its confines.



DANGEROUS are the ways of vanity, but none more so than that of the New York actress who, during a fire, kept firemen waiting on extension ladders while she changed to street clothes and then—by her leave—she was rescued.



THAT explorers have found a race of blond Chinese women with yellow curly hair seems strange enough, but that age is of no importance at all to these unusual women is stranger still. Is it because blonds do not show gray hairs?



EXOTIC is the fad of placing monograms made of gold on automobile headlights. There is little danger of the practice becoming popular.



World Without End

By May Edginton

Author of "The Price of Wings,"
"Triumph," etc.



SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTERS.

Despite her maternal pride and affection, it was not without a twinge of professional jealousy that Mrs. Light watched her lovely daughter step into her own abandoned shoes. Mrs. Light found it just a little difficult to surrender to Carla the place of London's most beautiful and popular actress; to see transferred to Carla the homage, the glances, the flowers—even the men—that had for so long been the colorful wake of her own brilliant progress.

But Carla was happy and successful and youthfully arrogant until John Prince came from Mexico to negotiate a loan for his mine, and crossed the settled path of Carla's career. It was then the young actress began to doubt the value of professional success, and to distrust the friendship of her intimate, Sara Deeping, whose lovely, honey-colored eyes lingered so oddly on Prince's face.

Prince, his loan arranged, found himself unable to leave Carla behind him. She, on the other hand, clutching to her a high ideal of marriage, was unwilling to rush blindly into it on the strength of a sudden infatuation. She suggested to him that they go together to Mexico and live together, as brother and sister, for a year. Then they would decide what should come after. Reluctantly, believing that she would yield and marry him before the year was out, Prince accepted her terms.

But Carla held firm. After months of deadlock, alone together in the wretched little mining town, shorn of her loveliness by serious illness, Carla found that Prince's devotion had turned to bitter exasperation, even as her own love grew more assured. Sara Deeping, coming unexpectedly out to the mine, found them so, at swords' points.

CHAPTER XIII.

CARLA lay, gaunt in her quaint, unlovely little bed, looking at Sara; and Sara stayed at the door, petrified, looking at Carla. Prince stood, stiff and straight and grim, looking from one girl to the other. Rage devastated Sara's heart—a biting, piercing, screaming rage, that she must lock her teeth upon and keep down. So the sick friend was not a Mexican, nor

an American, nor a half-caste, but just Carla—Carla who, for a whim, people thought, had decided to "rest" and visit friends in various parts of the civilized earth. It was Carla who had lived here, in this wretched brown mud house, with John Prince!

To Carla also, looking at Sara, came a transport of rage, but weak, helpless, ineffectual. Here she lay, untempting, ungenerous, unpowdered, unperfumed,

unmanicured; there stood Sara in the glow of her pale, radiant health, exquisitely tended, charmingly groomed, in a riding kit that here, in the wilds, was indubitably a London inspiration. And suddenly, breaking before Sara's radiance, Carla began to weep in earnest—not the facile tears of slack nerves as before, but tearfully, terribly.

Sara made a little sound: "My poor Carla!" But as she said it she was looking, not at her rival huddled on the insufficient pillows, but at Prince. How would he take that pitiful crying? She saw him look swiftly at Carla, bite upon his agony of aggravation and impatience; she heard him groan, driven, exasperated. He controlled himself and made some sort of move toward the bed, but Sara was there first.

She said to herself: "Oh, Heaven! She's tired him out! He's sick! He could murder her!" Inside herself Sara knew that she was laughing. Love was such a cruel, dramatic, yet ribald game! But she cried out strongly, sympathetically:

"John!" Carla suddenly brought her tear-spoiled face up, arrested at the use of the first name. "John! Leave this poor darling to me!"

Prince went out thankfully to the prosaic task of keeping the dinner hot. He went out like a man who can simply bear no more.

Carla sobbed and cried.

"Carla, my poor darling," Sara cooed, and she sat down on the bed, and laid her hand—a snowflake even in that heat—upon Carla's throbbing shoulders. "What's all this? Why are you here? When did you come? What is it?"

"Oh, Sara! Sara!"

"You are married to him, Carla?"

"No! No!"

"You are living with him——"

"No! No!"

"What am I to believe? What would any one believe in such circumstances?"

"I want to tell you—to hear some

one say what a fool I am! I will tell you all."

Piece by piece Sara extracted the truth from Carla.

Sara came very slowly, with a wholly subdued effect, from the bedroom, closing the door with delicate care for quietude. Her eyes expressed only wonder, her mouth gravity and sweetness, her whole bearing a subtle tolerance. Her words testified to her loyalty to Carla.

"John!"

Prince turned from the open doorway, where he had been loafing, hands in pockets, consumed with his hot thoughts. He crossed the floor to her in a couple of strides. His face lit up.

"Sit down and eat," commanded Sara sympathetically; for she had ridden hard and she meant to have her luncheon, Carla or no Carla.

When they were again at the table, she moaned:

"Poor darling Carla! Poor sweet, mad thing! If you knew how fond I am of her, you'd have an idea of what it meant to me when I went in there and saw her like that. She was so lovely."

"Don't I know it?" Prince groaned. "So lovely that she could simply devastate a man, and then——"

"Don't trouble yourself," said Sara, stretching out again the hand of friendly understanding as he paused. "What an ordeal to set a man! What a test! Only a mad thing like Carla would do it. She has—fanatic ideals. She has told me all about it."

"You believed her?" asked Prince quickly and sternly.

"But of course! It was Carla. I know her."

"She had an idea that marriage must be on the highest plane or not at all."

"It was beautiful in a way; fine!"

"Perhaps!" said Prince briefly; adding reluctantly: "Yes, indeed. But, Sara, is it not impossible?"

"I don't know," Sara sighed. "I fear it is to most of us. But Carla meant very beautifully."

"It has been hell."

"Ah! Who doesn't know that! Hell was made by the idealists!"

"I thought, of course, that I held all the cards. I thought, of course, that she would cave in, knock under, and be happy, or I wouldn't have let her come. But she——"

"I know most of it. Don't trouble to tell me."

And Sara did not tell him what Carla had wept to her, lying there with her head on Sara's lap, bewildered as to whether the flaxen girl were mostly friend or rival: "He hates me, Sara. For the last three months it has been hate. He said to me: If a man really acceded to my conditions, at the end of a year he would either have killed me for love, or he would hate me for eternity. That's what he has done—hated me. The last three months, he has never—never spoken of love to me, Sara, never asked me again! If he had, I—I'd have gone to Carada and married him. I would! I would! There came a point when I was broken, Sara. But he didn't know it! And I knew by then that he hated me!"

Sara did not tell Prince that.

Prince said, his hand on her friendly one:

"You stand up for her, Sara, like a little sport!"

"I shall always stand up for Carla."

"You are a generous thing, Sara."

"Am I?" she murmured.

She could be very generous indeed when she could afford it. She lifted her glass.

"To better days, John."

"To better days!"

They put down their glasses, their eyes looking into each other's, and he thought: "Was I blind not to see this woman for what she is? Sweet and gay and brave and gallant, and *human*.

Human! Give me humanity! Sara has it!" He asked aloud:

"What is to be done? Tell me!"

"That's easy," said Sara. "Carla's my friend, my care, the darling! I shall take her home."

"Sara! You angel!"

Later she said:

"We might all travel together."

"Wonderful!"

"I shall get a nurse at the first possible place for Carla, to travel with us."

Sara thought of long days on a ship with this man for companion; evenings in his arms, dancing; good-night walks on the boat deck under the winter stars, a strong arm holding her against the winds.

Carla, shepherded by a nurse picked up in the States, convalesced as well as she could, after the exhaustion of rail traveling, wrapped up in a chair on deck, or tucked into her berth in her cabin. She made great headway on the voyage; color came back and more fullness to her cheeks, and some of its old luster to her hair. She knew herself strangely different; older as if by years instead of months than that star-struck girl—who should have been a woman of the world, worldly, and wasn't—who came out, upon this very same ship, nine months ago. She looked with long, clear, desolate scrutiny at herself, and thought: "I am much wiser, much stronger, much harder; and wisdom, strength and hardness are what women need. Carla Light has had a bad beating—a dreadful defeat; and she has learned a lesson." As she sat in her chair on deck, nurse beside her, or went thankfully, very early, to her bed, she knew that Sara was spending the long days with John Prince as companion; the evenings in his arms, dancing; she knew there must be good-night walks on the boat deck under the winter stars, an arm holding Sara's slowness against the winds.

Had she not come out on this very ship, with the same companion?

So the three of them came back to London.

CHAPTER XIV.

The first thing Carla longed to see was the theater of her triumphs; and as Sara's big car drove them all from the London terminus to be dropped at their different destinations, they passed that way and she read in letters of light:

"BELLA"

By George Laferriere
MISS CARLA KING

She sat up from the furs in which she had sunk herself, crying:

"Mother!"

From among her furs Sara leaned forward.

"Yes, darling; I didn't tell you. I thought——" Sara's intuitive sympathies were apparent. "She took the part Mellor wanted you to play. I didn't see her before I left, but they say she's marvelous!"

"I am a fool!" Carla said to herself. "A fool! A fool! A fool! I have given everything that matters—for nothing." And Sara's eyes agreed with her. "My dear, haven't you been a precious fool?" the eyes asked.

In the lighted car she saw Prince's eyes upon her, too. There was no pity in these eyes. They were vivid and hard, sea-blue in his browned face. He smiled and there was all irony in that smile.

"Are you wondering how quickly you will get it all back, Miss Carla Light?"

Carla smiled a smile too faint to be the challenge that she meant.

"All the things that are most worth while to a woman," Prince added.

Carla continued that smile but it petrified on her mouth; it looked to be painted and dried there.

"After all," said Prince, "I see you have been wise."

Sara broke in then as one protecting Carla.

"She has been very, very wise, considering the genius that she is."

Carla kept that painted smile on her mouth all the way home.

Before they got there they had dropped Prince and his paraphernalia at the little house off Knightsbridge and Sara insisted on seeing Carla to her door. They were alone, for the nurse, superfluous, had been shed at Southampton, with her fees and return ticket.

"Well, Carla, darling?"

"Well, Sara, dear?"

"Happy?"

"Violently," Carla answered.

"Keep the upper lip stiff, dear."

"Sara!"

"What, dearest?"

"I gave up everything—everything! My work! My money! My fame! My friends! I worked for him, Sara, cooking, washing, mending. I—I've fought beside him, Sara, when there was a shindy at the mine. I—I—I meant beautifully——"

"My exact words to him, Carla."

"Did you say that to him? Sara, he understood nothing—nothing! He hasn't understood."

"Men don't."

"Couldn't he get even a glimmering of understanding about what I gave up—to help him to see that I meant—so very beautifully—for both of us?"

"Men don't seem to count it for much in a woman to give up money, fame, clothes, friends, career, and so forth. They somehow seem to think a woman values all those things about as much as a box of chocolates, to be laid aside easily when a man calls."

"I gave them up—for nothing, Sara. Nothing!"

"That was your mistake, my dear."

"Isn't such an experiment worth while—for what it may bring?"

"Men—they are egotists to the last man; they are selfish; they are greedy;

they are blind to everything they don't want to see; deaf to everything they don't want to hear; immoral; humbugs; liars; destroyers; and I love 'em," said Sara.

Sara leaned back among her furs in a dream, now and then patting Carla's hand.

And the car stopped in St. Anthony's Square.

"I won't be able to breathe now, with mother," Carla exclaimed passionately.

"Two stars in one household—and both women—too much of a glare altogether," Sara replied.

"Good night, Sara. Thank you for your loving kindness."

She saw Sara looking at her with an intense, shining, eager, hard scrutiny.

"And, Carla, to-morrow you'll phone Mellor? You're going right back?"

"I'm going right back!"

With a little purr of satisfaction Sara kissed Carla.

The flat breathed heavily of a perfumed load of flowers as Carla stepped in, using her latchkey. She saw it blazing opulence—her mother was always florid in her expression when unrestrained—and a strange servant met her. Her home expressed the nine-months' change in a direct way to Carla. It seemed no longer hers. She handed her furs to the new servant, and looked around. She thought: "Well, I must live somewhere."

The servant informed her:

"Miss King has ordered dinner for you, miss, at eight."

Carla dined alone, verily bowered in flowers.

Sara rang up as if to know: "Are you all right, darling?"

"Quite. Dining in solitary state. And you? All right?"

Then Sara said what she had rung up to impart:

"Oh, yes, John Prince is here. He phoned as soon as I got home; his servants hadn't had his wire, or perhaps

he forgot to send it. I took pity on him. Night, night! Dream sweetly. So glad you feel all right, which is all I wanted to know."

Clicking the receiver on its hook, Carla smiled her new, strange smile; it painted and dried itself on her mouth when she saw her mother.

Miss Carla King entered alone, instantly letting her wandering daughter know that such sacrifice was on her account merely.

She spoke gayly.

"Charlie Farnborough came back with me, but I wouldn't let him in. I said: 'Don't you know—haven't I published it abroad?—that my child will be here, waiting to see me, after nine whole long, dreadful months?' I shooed him off."

Then the embrace, light, slow, meaningless, perfumed.

Miss Carla King, blazing fragilely, beautifully, stood off to look at Miss Carla Light, thin, hectic, with but a spark of her old luster.

"How well you look, dear."

The lie of one woman to another, instead of the quick anxiety of mother for child! It was always thus since the little Carla had just reached her mother's shoulder.

"In spite of that alarming cablegram you sent me, about serious illness, you're looking—*wonderful!*"

"And you, mother!"

Miss Carla King undulated out of a satin wrap, and stood revealed, slim again, marvelous again with youth that was not yet quite youth, boneless as to movement, happy in her exoticism; a forced flower, orchidaceous.

"I, too, they tell me, darling." She sat down. "Was the dinner nice?"

"Perfect."

"I ordered it very carefully, expecting an invalid." Now Carla King was looking slowly all over, up and down, Carla Light, who remained cold, careless under that inspection. The inspec-

tion of a mother? The summary of a rival by a rival!

Carla knew that her mother missed no point—the sallowness that illness had left; the hands that not even a week's manicure daily in the beauty parlor of the liner had put quite right; the impoverished hair.

"So you've come back, Carla!"

"But not in the three months you prophesied, mother."

"I prophesied an alternative. Have you married him?"

"No."

"Why, child, why?"

Devoured with curiosity, student of life and character as she ever professed herself to be, saying: "An actress should be always learning," she stared at her daughter.

In a few sentences, cool, casual, from a bruised heart, Carla told why. She looked about the room casually as she spoke.

"What a wonderful mental experience!" sighed Carla King vividly.

Carla turned to stare at her in her turn.

"If it really is quite, *quite* all true," said Miss King. "If there's anything you want to tell me—a woman must unbosom herself at times, Heaven knows—why, a mother who has been through the fires of hell herself will be able to understand."

"But it is all true, exactly as I have told you!" Carla was fierce.

"I expect you have the soul, the heart of a nun," said the elder woman, "although I used to think you so like me." She spoke complacently. "I am sorry, if so. Cold women, somehow, never really maintain their first achievements—their early promise. They disappoint people, I suppose. People are chilled, in a way they cannot express, by non-development. I am sorry."

But she was glad. Carla knew it.

Carla knew another thing, too; that she herself had neither the soul nor the

heart of a nun. She rose, whispering tiredly.

"I'll go to bed. My—my old room?"

"Of course, love."

"Not of course. Your flat, now."

Mrs. Light—Miss Carla King—cried out in a happy murmur, at that. And she asked what was in her mind:

"You've come back to work again, darling? You—you'll go straight to Mellor?"

"Yes, mother. Work, bless it! Bless it! And you, mother—you're still playing *Bella*."

"Yes. Not having any address from you for so long, I haven't written any news. But '*Bella*' comes off in a month; and we're casting for the new play, '*Starlight*.'"

"'*Starlight*?'"

"And such a play, my dear! A mother-and-daughter play, almost. The difficulty's the mother. I find it difficult to choose myself a mother."

"To choose yourself— You play the daughter, then?"

"But, yes; yes, dear!"

"Signed your new contract?" asked Carla jealously.

"It has been drawn up, darling. I'm having a bit of a haggles with Mellor over terms."

Then the telephone bell rang.

"You, Harry?" cried Miss Carla King into the transmitter.

Carla Light walked out, clenching her hands in a seething tumult of resolves. Chief among them: "I *will* maintain my first achievements," hung itself out like a banner.

She went and laid herself down in a scented bath, using, lavishly, her mother's bath salts. As the warm, scent-clouded water lapped round her she began with a lifting heart to plan at the first moves of her renewed campaign. And she wondered how much money she had in the bank, and remembered that it would be a thousand pounds or more. And she made an-

other resolve that hung itself out like a banner—that she would fight all out to win—for herself—for her career.

"Sacrifice achieves nothing," said the bitter young Carla steeped in the sleepy bath. "From now on, I take, not give." She arose strengthened, as a woman does from much ruthless resolves, believing them; and she slept.

Carla went out early next morning and was busy with hairdresser, masseuse, and manicurist; and with Rachel the dressmaker. Then she went to see Mellor.

The great manager was pleased, but denunciatory. He had nursed a grievance against her—assuaged by Carla the elder, it is true, but nevertheless still living and nourished. Had he not treated her well? Was he not a prince among men? Was it not under his auspices that first she dazzled the public, and was it not by his advice, his guidance—

He wished to scold her. And Carla, knowing that for this hour or two at least she looked again very beautiful indeed, and that a man loves to scold, to bully, to hector lovingly, a beautiful girl, left him to do it. She sat listening.

She sat meek. She sat sorry, and genuinely troubled and childishly surprised. At the end of twenty minutes Mellor was smooth and happy. He had enjoyed himself. And he remembered that he esteemed her highly; she was a girl men respected and revered, and humbled themselves to. Having had his fling, Mellor now commenced to play his rôle. And he believed all he said implicitly.

Carla, sitting so beautifully meek, so youthfully desirous again of his strong guidance, knew that he was hers. And she told him:

"I want to get back again at once. At once!"

"High time," said Mellor. "You have been away too long already. At your age, my child, it isn't seemly to

play these tricks on the public. You must wait awhile before allowing yourself a temperament that calls you hither and thither. And now, tell me, privately, confidentially—I am your friend—where *did* you go? What did you do?"

Carla told Mellor anything but the truth; because he would only have believed half of it, anyway.

He resumed, partly satisfied:

"Unfortunately, Carla, there is nothing I can put you into at the moment. I wish to Heaven there was."

"But you are going to do a wonderful play—'Starlight.'"

"Yes, but"—he raised a forefinger and shook it rebukingly—"the big part is already arranged. Your mother—that extraordinary mother of yours—is going to play an innocent girl of twenty-three, and she'll play it to the life!"

"There is a mother's part——"

"Ah, yes! But you could not play your mother's mother——" Then, as Carla looked at Mellor, he broke off. He rose and walked about, saying at intervals: "Magnificent if—but she wouldn't. Of course, curiously enough, we haven't agreed upon terms yet, but it's understood—— Carla, come out to lunch!"

Carla and Mellor went to lunch.

It was December and the shops were bright with emblems of Christmas. The streets were full of people walking, buying for Christmas. The air was full of the innocent lure of toy bazaars. There was a light frost and a jolly sun. "Darling London!" said Carla's heart with a sob in it.

"We'll go to the Legation Club, if you approve," said Mellor; and directed his big limousine thither.

On the way he was thinking deeply, and talking in snatches:

"It's amusing, rather, to think of it—if we could pull it off. And, of course, Carla, in a way, though you don't de-

serve it, you little fool, it would be a sort of poetic justice. People have laughed and said to me it wasn't quite the game for your own mother to be stepping right into your shoes, even if you did leave them chucked about the place—stepping into your sort of parts, as she has. As for me, I have nothing but admiration for her. Still, it would be a nice scoop if we could get her to play the mother, and give you the girl, eh?"

They arrived at the Legation Club, and in one of the cushioned purple seats before a table, against the greenish Adam walls, Mellor took it up again.

"Besides," he argued on, "it would be charming. The public would love the two of you together. Look, Carla, if she will do it, I'll give her the money she wants, and you must take the lower salary, eh?"

Carla nodded.

"Yes, anything."

"Heavens, child! You are hungry and thirsty for work, aren't you?"

"Oh, Mr. Mellor, I am! Hungry and thirsty for it!"

"You see, you don't need these protracted holidays a bit."

"Not a bit. Never again!"

"Carla, do you think we can get her to do it?"

And then across the room she saw Harry Avon lunching alone, with his serene air, and she remembered that late telephone call of last night, and her mother's purposely conscious look as she answered it. Her mother had put on that little conscious look—the next-door neighbor to a blush—so that Carla should see that she had the old flame back. Harry Avon was hers again.

And Carla understood enough to think now, at sight of Harry, "It will mean a lot to her, a horrible lot, to play matron again. It might mean Harry—and any young men she has

added to her train these last nine months."

Carla felt predatory, distressed.

Yet she had so little softness concerning her mother that these feelings died directly she saw Harry Avon see her, and rise quickly and approach the table where she sat with Mellor. It was so good to see Harry's kind again, for all they represented—attendance, attentions, amusing talk, a cleverness, an art in the use of life brought to careful perfection. Suave, secure, very understanding of women, were Harry and his kind.

"Carla! From which end of the world do you come?"

"I've been visiting people here and there, in the States."

"The States?" said Harry. "Wonderful how you avoided all publicity in these days."

"Oh, it is easy, if one is determined."

"You look—splendid," said Harry.

She knew that Harry's unerring eyes had sought and found the ravages of the last nine months in her face, assuaged as they were now, and she said lightly:

"It's good to hear it, for I've been rather ill."

"Ill, my dear?"

"Typhoid."

"How horrible! My poor Carla! Where were you then?"

"In Texas."

"How more than horrible!"

Harry stood looking down at her, smiling, suave, sympathetic and debonaire, and she knew that he detected her lying. She was humiliated, for now, with her flag down, she was prouder than ever.

She knew Avon to be wondering within himself.

"Where did Carla go? Why? With whom?"

He was saying to Mellor:

"You'll put her in harness again immediately, we all hope."

"It is what we are talking of now," the manager replied.

"Ask Mr. Avon to sit down with us," said Carla. "He's finished lunch, haven't you, Harry? He will talk to my mother for us, you know."

"How do you know what I will do for you, Carla?" Avon smiled. He sat down.

As he asked that, Mellor had turned to sign to a waiter to bring Harry's coffee with theirs; and Carla and he looked into each other's eyes. A flicker in Harry's leaped to fire; a flicker that was no more than a flicker in Carla's answered it. She knew, as a woman must, that Harry would do a very great deal—his utmost, for her, if she but lifted a finger; but she knew at the same time that that lifted finger must be a definite sign of more to come. She hardened her heart, trying to think to herself flippantly: "Why not take Harry? Perhaps—marry him? One could. He'd let me stay on the stage; he'd prefer a celebrated wife if he must have a wife at all. With Harry I should stay myself. Haven't I done with ideals? Haven't I done with trying to live splendidly? It didn't work!"

"You *do* look—very beautiful, Carla," Harry said softly while Mellor spoke to the waiter, and Carla mused on these things.

But she knew that he knew her to be different. She was quieter, unlighted. What does a man think when he sees that a radiant, reckless girl has changed into a quiet, contemplative woman?

She laughed a little cynically, thinking of the arduous hour spent in trying frocks at Rachel's and how at the end of it she had writhed herself into this vision of velvet and fur that she now wore, hoping for its due effect on Mellor. Whatever her other friends thought, it wouldn't do to have Mellor summing her up: "Here's my star come back ill; a dowd; not a twinkle in her."

Mellor turned to the table:

"Look here, Avon, we have been talking treachery, Carla and I. This girl is a matricide. Murdering her own mother! She wants Miss King's part in 'Starlight.'"

Harry sat there, saying "h'm" thoughtfully; amused as usual by people's little greeds and basenesses.

"It's how I would have cast it, had this girl been here," Mellor complained, "but she wasn't here; I had no news of her; couldn't get any news. I cast her mother for the part, and beautifully she'd do it. Now here's Carla—"

"There's not a doubt as to who ought to play it, my dear Mellor."

"Not a doubt, Avon. You're right." The manager's eye turned on Carla's face, now flushed like a rose as she listened. "It's one of your parts, Carla; the second part I had practically written for you, *Bella* being the other. Yes! And if you'd been here, my girl, 'Bella' would have been running still. It was a low trick you played me, bolting like that!"

"I'm sorry."

She conveyed to those two listening men, without being aware of her own heartfelt manner, that she was sorry indeed. Asking her nothing, each thought his thoughts about those American visits of hers. They covered, doubtless, an episode that she imagined had broken her heart. Mellor thought: "Something of that sort has to happen to all of 'em before they settle down. She'll work all right now without trouble."

"The girl's sorry, Mellor," said Harry gayly.

"And is forgiven," said Mellor, squeezing Carla's hand, that trifled on the table.

"You'd better talk to mother, Harry."

"I, my dear? I?"

"Talk to Miss King, Avon," Mellor urged. "Tell her it'd only be the maternal thing to do. If she'll play mother

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to Carla's girl, I'll give her the same salary she would have had if this hadn't happened, and Carla'll take less."

"I tell you I'll take anything!" Carla cried; and then bit her lips.

Harry, with his flair for managing things somehow, took her from Mellor; took her home.

She was with Harry again, in the perfumed, overpowering flat; Harry with his man-of-the-world gentleness and patience; his tact; his control; his cleverness; his whole comfortableness. The flicker was now little more than a kindly understanding, human, in his eye.

Miss Carla King was out.

Carla Light stood on the hearth, looking blazingly about her, loosening the furs at her throbbing throat, wrinkling her nose at the perfumed air; beautiful but hectic; slim to extreme thinness.

"Harry, I can't stand this place!"

"It's a little—intense, dear."

"Mother always——"

"She must adorn the lily, as we know."

"I must get out and have a little place of my own, where things can be simpler, airy, as I like to have them."

"A much better arrangement, if you do."

"You must help me find a flat."

"I, Carla? Why, my dear, I will do anything for you."

"You see, Harry, I came back—— You seem, somehow, my only friend, my only real friend, without a change."

Her lips trembled. Harry was unchanged. True, he was again her mother's admirer; but then, one knew Harry. That counted little.

"My dear child!"

"I will have a little flat, all my own; and, if Mellor will only give me this part——"

"He will."

"If mother will only let him——"

"She will. You see, Carla, the theater world will look at it like this. You

go away—for a change. Your very charming mother rejuvenates herself and steps into your shoes, but only pro tem; only pro tem, my dear, till your return. She must know—she's so clever—that she must give the shoes back. It was only your going off in your sudden way that gave her that chance."

"I am arguing it out with myself like that. I—I want to be fair. At least I think I do!"

Harry laughed, but commiseratingly. There was none of Prince's cruel and vivid scorn about him. And she remembered vaguely that she had never known Harry other than tolerant.

Oh! how comfortable!

And she was tired. He was like a resting place.

"Don't worry, Carla. The problem isn't yours, but Mellor's. The man's not mad. He sees his obvious course. Your most charming mother is too old for these parts, my dear—no one regrets it more than I—attractively as she has carried them off. Your public has missed you, Carla, and she was a piquant substitute. But sit down, dear girl. Rest! You're looking intense. Never look intense, my dear, much less feel it. In a week you will be rehearsing for 'Starlight,' and your mother, with a good grace, will be playing your mother—for the first time in her life," Avon ended whimsically.

Quite suddenly Carla burst into hysterical tears.

The next moment she was against Harry's shoulder, his arms round her, sobbing:

"Oh, Harry, hold me! Do hold me tight! I'm so tired, Harry, so sick—so sick of everything. But—but I must take hold again, Harry, mustn't I? I feel lost. I'm somehow frightened. What's the matter with me? I—I—I must get back again, mustn't I? Help me! Help me!"

"My dear child! Sit here. Tell me everything."

She was in a great easy-chair with Harry, her head on his shoulder.

"Success is everything, Harry. Everything! I've tried—the other way. I'll never give up again. Never! Never! Never! I swear it! I—I'll play for myself. I—I—I'll never believe again all that rubbish that—that somehow women do believe in, if they don't keep a very tight hand over themselves. I'll keep a tight hand on myself, Harry. I'll never sacrifice again. Work, fame, conquest—they're the things best worth having, for women as well as men. Harry! Why don't men understand better? Why don't they mean what they say—say what they mean, Harry? Why? Why?"

"My dearest child! Don't cry. Don't cry. Have my big hanky. Here! Dearest child—darling—tell me everything."

Harry's voice, soothing, mesmeric. She could have told him everything, as from a dream. It seemed a dream, with a bitter, longing awakening—that time with Prince. And Harry's voice, soothing, mesmeric. Yet something—a distrust, a weariness—held her back from entire revelation. She felt him too tolerant, too sane; her agony of soul did not reach him; the crying of women was to him the mewling of distressed kittens, to be silenced with caresses, cream, jewels, moneybags. Masculine fifty was experienced with the tears of feminine twenty-three.

She shook her head, against his neck. He betrayed a shade more eagerness; curiosity.

"Tell me, dear!"

"I don't believe even you would understand, Harry."

"Even I? Dear little girl! Try me."

But again she shook her head decidedly.

"Carla, dear child, listen. I will help you to find the flat; I will help you to get that part, against your mother. I'll make it all so smooth for you, child,

so happy! I shall help you to forget—whatever it is. I am your devoted friend, my dear." He lifted her hand and kissed it. "Carla, I love you."

"Ah, Harry, don't say it. I'm tired of it."

"And I am not the sort of fierce fool who would want to sweep you up away from all your successes, and spoil you, and ruin you, my dear. You see? I understand. You'd be—very free."

"Don't talk about it, Harry."

"Then you talk, Carla. Talk! Tell me why you cry! Where have you been and what have you done, dear Carla?"

"Get up, Harry. Sit over there."

Harry Avon left her sitting alone in the great chair, her elbows on her knees, her chin cupped in her palms. Tears still dropped down her cheeks. He walked to the window and looked out at the bare tree tops of the square, wondering, yet almost certain, in his man's way, of why this woman cried. A lover? A love affair unhappily ended? Unhappily? This time next year, secure on her own road again, her face set toward her stars of fame and fortune, Carla Light might bless that ending.

Woman did. Women's madresses were soon over.

Carla sat there, unable to tell Harry, relief though it would have been. Only Sara knew, and Sara had been curiously unsatisfactory, as woman to woman, over the whole business. Sara had spoken of it, not once, but several times, as "this episode of yours, darling." "Episode!" This ache, this longing, this garden of memories and avalanche of regrets—an episode! Staring out into the room, with her face between her hands, Carla felt that to kill Sara would be pleasure.

Sara had said: "You know perfectly well what the rest of the world would think of the story, dearest."

And Carla had answered once more:

"Sara, I meant it so beautifully. It—it fell flat."

"He wouldn't play your way? Men don't, Carla."

And Sara had then looked long and skeptically at Carla, so that she had asked: "Sara, you—you believe all I say?"

Sara answered with promptness: "Of course, dearest; I am your friend," denying it with that skeptical look.

Avon returned from the window to Carla's chair and sat upon the arm of it.

"Better, dear?"

"I am all right, Harry."

The telephone bell rang.

"Answer it, Harry."

He rose, and picked up the receiver.

"Miss Light? . . . Yes, she is here. . . . I seem to know your voice. . . ."

A faint, abrupt laugh over the wire, then:

"This is John Prince, speaking."

"Prince! Why, you back again? I thought from your last letter that—"

"I ought to have cabled you when I started. I didn't. I got back the other day. I rang you just now and you were out."

"I am with Carla."

That faint, abrupt laugh over the wire.

"Of course!"

Carla was out of her chair, seizing the receiver from Harry. Her cheeks flamed in patches of scarlet.

"Hullo! This is Carla."

And Harry stood close, watching her.

"I rang up to know how you were; I hope you are not tired out."

"Thank you. Splendid! I feel *splendid*! I am very busy. Where are you telephoning from?"

"Sara's house."

This time Carla sent her laughter over the wire, as if she defied the earth.

"Good-by!"

She jerked the receiver back.

"Terse," smiled Harry. "Terse."

"My dear, one can't hang about at a

telephone all day. Did you want him again?"

"I can call him later."

"I forgot you are mixed up in his affairs."

"Curious that his return coincides exactly with yours, Carla."

"We were on the same boat!"

"Ah!"

"He and Sara and I."

"Sara, too. All home! Amusing!"

"Your sense of humor is easily satisfied, Harry."

"Ah, my dear, be terse with him; but not with me."

"Harry!"

"Carla?"

"When the money was gone, didn't—you didn't cable more, or authorize him—"

"My dear, it was all a certain loss."

"Why did you participate—don't they call it that?—at all, then?"

"Sportsmanship. A gamble. Besides, I like the man."

"Sara was the biggest participant, Harry?"

"What do you know about it, Carla?"

"She was? She was? I'm guessing! Tell me. Adrian Brabazon did it for her?"

"You know it all."

"Sara didn't cable home, to tell Adrian—"

"To cable more money to Prince? Adrian's gone to the East with his regiment, and Sara put his engagement ring carefully away and disappeared into the void much as you did. And it wouldn't have been any good her cabling to me to manage it for her. I wouldn't have done it. She's dropped ten thousand."

"Ten thousand!"

Watching Carla, Harry replied lightly:

"Sara will pay any price for what she wants."

Carla moistened her lips with a tongue tip, trying to say naturally:

"And the engagement ring? Adrian?"

"Before he went East he wouldn't be happy without fixing up something; and as he was going East Sara thought it didn't much matter anyway," Harry replied chuckling.

Carla was thinking to herself:

"He is in Sara's house now. He went there—to lunch. He's still there. Sara—always Sara!" And thinking of Sara, she felt herself, as always, in a whirlpool of currents too swift and difficult—the whirlpool of Sara's thought and schemes and plots and complexities.

Harry watched her. He took her hand coaxingly to bring her back to the big chair. She cried out:

"There's one thing Sara can't do and she knows it. She daren't tell him that it's her money he's been working on all these months; and her money that he lost!"

Harry agreed.

"No, there are still some men left in the world who wouldn't insult themselves by taking money from a woman. And Prince is one of them."

"He would hate her for it?"

"Perhaps," said Harry.

"It would humiliate him!"

"It certainly would," said Harry.

"How could you let it happen?"

"I disclaim responsibility. It was between Sara and Brabazon. If Adrian said it was his money, who am I to contradict him?"

"I am going to tea with Sara."

"Now? This afternoon?"

"She asked me."

Whereupon Harry watched Carla powder her face, rouge her lips, and straighten the crushed robe of fur and velvet that was Rachel's latest masterpiece; and he took her down to his waiting car.

"You liar, Carla!" he said, when they were in it.

But he dropped her at Sara's door without protest.

CHAPTER XV.

The same butler, opening Sara's door, the same smell of heavy-scented flowers in the same great bowl of Bristol glass on the same oak chest in the hall; the same sense of luxury as one went up the first flight of stairs to Sara's own sitting room—it was where she would be, with Prince, in that intimate place, of course!—the same shadowy, firelit, colorful glimpse of the small, purple room as one entered; all unchanged, uninterrupted, though those nine blazing months had passed! Though the flat in St. Anthony's Square had altered exuberantly, and above Mellor's finest theater Miss Carla Light had given place to Miss Carla King, in letters of fire!

Only Sara pursued her course, it seemed to Carla.

They sat by the fire, Sara on the rug, caressing idly a Persian kitten made of white fluff and blue eyes, while she listened to Prince, who sat close to her, on one of her soft, purple chairs. Sara was all flaxen again; she had told her maid to find that flaxen frock of months ago; and she had put it on.

The aunt, as usual, had excused her existence by obliteration.

As Carla stood in the doorway, the butler saying very quietly in a voice attuned to the room, "Miss Light," that soft, eager talk by the fire stopped.

Carla held her head high, her eyes flashing, her lips curved to their loveliest smile. She knew why she had come, while she had no reason, no defense for it. Nature, fierce, simple, had sent her there, though she looked anything but a child of nature as she stood before them, elegantly poised. She looked an exotic, precious, disdainful.

"Sara, you asked me to tea."

"My dear," said Sara, sure that this was a lie, yet unable to deny it, "I did. But I never thought you'd be so sweet—or so vigorous—as to come."

"I'm very vigorous to-day." She

hugged Sara, who had risen to her feet, and the hug was histrionically perfect.

"And you, John? How are you? I had hung up the receiver, just now, before I thought of telling you to remind Sara that I was coming."

They made a place for her between them politely, even cordially, as people welcoming a stranger, and there Carla sat, feeling a stranger.

"I was telling him," said Sara, turning to Carla, "that I believe I know of a purchaser for his adorable little house."

And Carla cried suddenly:

"I want a house! I want a house!" She stopped under the ice of Prince's blue eyes. They looked like gleams of polar seas.

The thought had flashed to her jealously: "Why shouldn't I be the one to help him? To buy his house? Why should Sara? She will buy it herself, in the aunt's name, and settle the aunt in it rather than not get him what he wants!"

"Buying a house is rather a large order, Carla," said Prince coldly.

"Dearest," added Sara, "aren't you going to live with your mother?"

"I can't breathe there."

"That's Mexico. That's what wide spaces have done for you, poor thing!"

"Perhaps." She looked at Prince.

"Can I buy your house?"

A stubborn defiance stronger than herself made her ask that, though she knew what he would answer.

"I would rather sell to a stranger—make it a purely business matter, you know, Carla." And looking her in the eyes, he added, satirically, courteously, mocking a woman's helping hand: "No favors."

If he knew of Sara's participation!

"But Sara——" Carla murmured, her histrionic talent keeping her well under control.

"Sara's friends are strangers to me; it would be a business matter."

"You must see, Carla darling," Sara struck in, "it would be rather different."

"How cleverly Sara does it all," thought Carla. "How easily women carry things through, if they never scruple whether it is by truth or lies! I wish I could be like her—what men call feminine."

But that stubborn quality in her, which had rebelled at easy surrender, at lowering of the forlorn flag, in Mexico, now made her rebel at deceiving Prince over more material matters. She wanted to say: "Let me buy the house," and not to go to her lawyers, as Sara would, and arrange the purchase under some other name, to hoodwink Prince and his male pride. She wanted, all the time, truth, truth! And she hated to acknowledge that women seldom give or receive it.

It was ironic, the three of them sitting there; Sara literally very rich; Carla at least potentially, at her own choosing, also rich; and the strong, proud, careless, fighting man whom they both loved, without a penny, and inherently contemptuous of woman's assistance.

Sara, with her sense of humor keeping her laughing all the while, inside herself, with her entire lack of scruple in getting what she wanted, and her utter lawlessness as woman, under all her guise of frivolous femininity, would humiliate him in secret, behind his back, and think—if she thought at all—that it was the immemorial way women had to deal with men—deception all the time. But Carla told herself: "I can't! I can't!"

Carla liked life to be splendid; she liked it to be an open road.

She drew herself back a little into her chair, into a deeper shadow, from which she searched the red fire before her, as women do, for answers to their questions. Of herself and Sara she knew: "We don't fight with the same weapons."

Sara was sweetly asking:

"But, Carla, what of yourself? We want to know, don't we?" She appealed to Prince.

"We do."

When a woman is in love, words smite her heart like a blow. That "we" smote Carla. That "we"—so linked, so natural, so intimate!

Carla looked from one to the other, while her own face remained in that deeper shadow into which she had withdrawn herself. And she said in a voice dispassionate from weakness caused by that unexpected, bitter blow over the heart:

"As I said over the phone just now, I feel splendid; I am very busy. I lunched with Mellor to-day, and he is anxious for me to return immediately."

And she watched the beginning of a very grim smile carven on Prince's mouth.

Sara gave little coos of sheer comfort and relief.

"Dearest, but of course he is anxious! You'll begin directly you're strong enough?"

"I'm strong enough now."

An inquiring coo from Sara.

"I want to play lead in his new piece, 'Starlight.'"

An ecstatic coo from Sara.

Prince without moving, asked curiously:

"Do you really?"

Carla looked him straight in the icy blue eyes, from her shadow. His cold voice saying, "Do you really?" with that intense, insulting curiosity in it! His ironic masculine doubts still lingering in him! While her heart was flaming: "No! There is one place where I would like to be—in Carada standing before a priest, with you! And then back to the brown house on the other side of those hills; and then love and life, and fighting with you for the mine!" Her voice replied coolly.

"I do indeed!"

"So, Carla," said Sara, "all has been arranged already. How wonderful!"

"Wonderful!" cried Carla. "Wonderful to be back at my work again, in my London again; to be really thrilled again, really dressed again! To live again!"

Prince listened to her, still as a rock. Now she turned to him. She reminded him dreamily with a smile:

"Two months ago we were in Mexico. Two months ago, at this time, I had washed your clothes and mine, and put them out to dry in the courtyard; I had cleaned the house, and was, I expect, concocting a tempting dish for your supper. Two months ago I was sweating like a beast of burden; I was lonely; I was haggard; I was tired; I was plain. My London was five thousand miles away. Isn't it, as Sara says, too wonderful?"

He did not reply but sat watching her immovably.

Sara made little murmurs to fill in the pause:

"Both mad, completely mad, of course! Platonic expeditions must get on one's nerves. But after all perhaps Carla was wise. The experiment answered itself, now didn't it? And both of you good friends still. That's no less than magnificent!"

Sara's murmurs were so indefinite that Prince's words seemed no interruption.

He leaned forward, his eyes on Carla's.

"You managed brilliantly, bore with it most bravely—considering how you hated it."

"Ah, I am an actress."

"She is an actress," said Sara.

Carla smiled, serenely now. She told herself that the worst was over; pain would not again be so great. She was killing—had killed—in Prince all his love, his ardor, his admiration for her. His brain was doubtless registering her as that thing of man's biased imagina-

tion, the modern woman; quick, hard, shining, insensitive, uncompromising; cultivated to a beauty hitherto unattained in the history of the world; exotic, yet Amazonian. Serenely Carla smiled on.

"Happy, then?" said Prince.

"Happy!" she sighed, infusing her voice with ecstasy.

"When do you open in 'Starlight,' Carla?" Sara inquired.

"If I land the part, my dear, in a month, I believe."

"You'll still be here?" Sara appealed to Prince.

"If I am, you must allow me to escort you to see Carla's triumph."

"You may be in London for a month longer, then?" Carla cried.

"Alas, yes! I expect so. Money, my dear Carla, doesn't flow into my coffers as it does into yours! I am beating round in the City again."

"Your house?"

"The mortgage on that doesn't make it an absolutely tempting proposition."

"These friends of mine, now in France," said Sara, lying with a guileless face, "will be over in ten days or so, and are longing to look at it. They want a house just there."

"Ten days' delay!" Carla thought. "What for?"

And then she realized that Sara was playing for delay; that in ten days anything might happen. She might even be Prince's wife.

Yes, she might even be Prince's wife, for his head and his heart and his pride were sore with anger and defeat, and the irk of his empty pockets. And when Sara was Prince's wife, who knew? Carla did not know, but she supposed that he might never go back to the mine at all. She knew, too, that these things had not yet definitely occurred to Prince himself.

Carla took off her hat, and dropped it to the floor, and rumbled her sleek hair. It was her old childish gesture.

"Tired, my dear?" asked Sara.

Carla saw, from under her lashes, Prince's eyes still gleaming upon her.

"Tired, my dear! Far from it!"

Prince made an exclamation, smothered it, and got up quickly.

"I must go, Sara. I have an appointment."

"Business?"

"Let's hope so."

"Good luck to business!" Heartily she stretched out her little hand to ratify the good wish; but Carla knew now instinctively that Sara did not hope for Prince's luck. She wanted him to fail; she wanted to keep him here, till she had thrown her net over him.

Carla thought to herself, as Sara had done all those months before: "The power of women! But he does not know it."

She laid a cool, limp hand for an instant in Prince's, and bade him lightly: "Au 'voir."

They glanced at each other with strange, somber eyes before he went out.

Sara settled down before the fire with Carla.

"I've been sitting here, dreaming, talking, ever since lunch. Now let's have tea. You can reach the bell, dearest."

And Carla watched the arrival of Sara's teacups, familiar like the rest of it. Stupidly, it felt to her as if all the outer appurtenances of life should be changed with the change those months had wrought in herself.

"Now, Carla, a cigarette; or will you eat?"

"A cigarette; and China tea."

"He will never get the money together," said Sara gently, smoking too. "The history of that mine isn't convincing. Harry won't go in again."

"And Adrian?"

"Adrian is in China, my lamb." Then looking at Carla, Sara saw that she knew.

"How did you know, Carla?"

"That it was your money and Adrian's name? Somehow I always guessed."

"You won't tell him—Prince?"

"It would humiliate him too much," said Carla fiercely.

Sara smoked in silence; then:

"You are such a fine, sensitive person, Carla. It is a privilege to know you. I have always said it."

"Thank you," Carla replied in mockery.

The room darkened. The servant returned to draw the curtains over the wintry windows.

"Lights, miss?"

"No lights, Sara!" Carla pleaded quickly. The servant went out again.

"Sara, why—why, since I see how you mean to keep him in London now, if you can, why did you help him to go ten months ago? Was it—then—to get him out of London?"

Sara's reply when it came was:

"But, after all, you went with him."

"Yes; you didn't know I should throw up my contracts, and——"

"Make a fool of yourself."

"I suppose that's what I did; made a fool of myself."

"Carla, all that is dead safe with me. And your mother is quite clever. She doesn't talk, unless she means to."

"Oh, I am safe. I have escaped scatheless!"

"What are you going to do now, Carla? About him?"

"Forget!" cried Carla.

"How brave you are!" With a little sigh Sara praised her. "So different from other women who love champing over their disillusiones! You are so new, Carla!"

Carla smiled.

"Now you see," Sara murmured on. "I am not new; I am old, terribly old. I find the old ways the most diverting of all."

"Diverting!" Carla's voice echoed Sara's faintly.

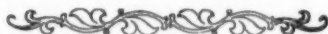
"A woman should divert herself with life; not let it rack her. The old ways, for women, my dear! They are splendid and so full of pageantry; and there's glamour; and as for brain—you know, my dear, Cleopatra, Helen, Ninon, all those creatures, were the swiftest thinkers in the world. Women like them, and their humble imitators, like your mother and me, Carla, have the art of life."

"My mother once told me never to care; or to give anything that I couldn't take back."

"And?"

"And I am taking everything back. I will forget."

TO BE CONTINUED.



STORY

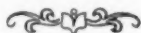
SILVER dust in a blue-glass bowl,
Grains of silver in the light,
Rich blue silver in a bowl
Like Helen's eyes at night.

High on the sand before Troy fell,
White thrones stood where the blue seas roll;
Only this dust is left to tell—
Silver dust in a blue-glass bowl.

CHARLES NORMAN.

The Final Sentence

By Mrs. Belloc Lowndes



WITH a sudden cry of fear Enid Rayburn sat up in the Jacobean four-post bed where she had spent a broken night. She was still plunged in the heavy sleep induced by a big dose of her favorite sleeping draft. But any one standing, say, by the large, half-moon window of the delightful old-world country bedroom would have thought her awake, for her violet-blue eyes were wide open, and dilated.

How lovely she looked! How child-like was the pure, delicate contour of her face, and the droop of her little red mouth. Her dimpled shoulders rose from a nightgown which even to the indulgent eyes of her hostess, the quaintly named spinster, Matilda Fidgett, looked more like a ball dress than what Miss Fidgett understood was now called a "nightie." It was of pale-pink crêpe de Chine, and the sleeveless bodice terminated with a deep band of real lace. Even in her own and her late husband's worst financial straits Enid Rayburn had always achieved the possession of a beautiful and luxurious wardrobe.

Who, looking at her now, framed in the shadowed, delicious stillness of Miss Fidgett's best guest room, would have believed that this lovely girl—for she still looked a girl—had just gone through the most awful ordeal which can fall to the lot of a civilized woman? Yet so it was, for Enid Rayburn had been the principal witness in a murder

trial which had excited the whole of Europe. Godfrey Lynworth, the man in the dock, had been a brilliant medical student, and for unrequited love of Mrs. Rayburn he had committed the dastardly crime of secret murder by poison, his victim being her husband. This morning at nine o'clock he was to be hanged.

There were thousands of human beings who, had they been privileged to see Enid Rayburn now, on this memorable morning, would have felt their hearts contract with intense pity for one they believed an innocent victim of an extraordinary series of ironic circumstances.

There were also tens of thousands who, having had serious doubts as to the part she had played in the singular tragedy, would have told themselves that their half suspicions had been cruelly unjust, could they have gazed into that flowerlike face, and heard the words now escaping from her half-opened mouth. Those words, uttered in an appealing, broken tone, were:

"Don't hurt him! Please don't hurt him!" And then: "Oh, Godfrey, I am so sorry for you!"

All at once the pupils of her blue eyes dilated, and there flashed a look of horror over her face, while the bright, pure color receded, leaving it very pale. In dreamland time and space are annihilated. She found herself suddenly transported to a small, bare room which she knew to be the condemned cell of

the prison where an execution was to take place that morning. There stood by the pallet bed the tall figure of the youth who had loved her with so passionate and guilty a love. Lynworth was collarless and clad in an old tweed suit she remembered well. He held himself upright, with his head thrown back in what had been a characteristic attitude. Two men were pinioning his arms and legs, and it was to them that Mrs. Rayburn had just addressed her piteous plea.

On one side, watching the scene as she was watching it, was the chaplain, together with the governor of the prison. It was all exactly like a scene in a play she had once seen, in the old, happy, careless days.

The pinioned youth began walking with steady steps, his head still thrown back, down a narrow passage, and then Enid gave a stifled shriek, for suddenly she saw the gallows tree. She covered her face with her hands, yet something seemed to force her to peep through her fingers, and, for a flashing moment, Godfrey Lynworth turned and looked at her, and that long gaze was so charged with mute, terrible reproach, that with an anguished cry of protest she awoke—awoke to the blessed reality of the delightful country bedroom so instinct with a delicious, while yet a comfortable security.

Her shaking hand felt for her watch on the tiny Chippendale table by her bed, and, having found it, she held it up before her eyes.

Only seven o'clock? She sighed heavily. This meant that there were two more hours of misery and suspense to be lived through—probably two hours and a half, for the faithful friend who had promised to stand near the prison gate till the death notice was put up, and who was then to telephone to her from a house near by, had thought it unlikely she could get a call through before half-past nine.

It was cruel, cruel that she should have waked like this at seven, when the same dose of chloral taken by her the night after her cross-examination had given her a measure of merciful oblivion for fourteen hours! She had only slept eight hours now.

The tears were rolling down Enid Rayburn's face. But it was not for him—for Godfrey Lynworth and his awful fate—that she was weeping. It was pity of herself, for all she had gone through, and what remained for her to go through, till she knew that he had died, as he had lived, silent. Deep down in her heart she was aware that not only Sir Marcus Tryst, his counsel, believed him innocent, but also that Godfrey's heartbroken father and mother hoped against hope that he would clear himself by shifting the burden of guilt to her. Those cruel old people had actually found out where she was hiding and had made her a frantic appeal to save their boy, their Benjamin, by incriminating herself.

She shuddered now, remembering that interview, for that had been the only time she had felt really frightened. Every one else had been so kind; even during that long cross-examination by Sir Marcus Tryst, she had been supported by the feeling that the judge, the jury, and all the spectators in that horrible, crowded court, had been on her side. Indeed, at more than one of the probing, cruel questions put to her by Sir Marcus, there had run a murmur of disapproval round the public galleries, and once the judge had sternly threatened to clear the court.

But when those two people, old Mr. and Mrs. Lynworth, had forced themselves upon her, then Enid Rayburn had gone through some terrible moments. And yet she had taken what she had thought to be a very kind and sympathetic line with those unfortunate people. She had told them that she, too, did not believe their son could be guilty,

and that she was always racking her brain to think who could be. They had not dared, either of them, to say right out what they believed, but at the end of that painful interview, Mrs. Lynworth, looking straight into her eyes, had said:

"You know who did it, Mrs. Rayburn; but I suppose we cannot expect you to tell the truth, for you never loved Godfrey. He adored you, but you only"—and then the old woman had used a most horrid word, a word Enid had never heard uttered aloud by any human being. Godfrey's mother, that fine-bred lady, had actually so lost control of herself as to say—"You only lusted after him."

No wonder Mr. Lynworth had taken his wife's arm and said:

"You forget yourself, my dear. Saying that kind of thing will not help Godfrey."

When she had told her own counsel, the great Sir John Dimmock, something of that terrible interview, he had expressed great indignation. Nothing, he had exclaimed, could excuse the impropriety, of such an action on their part.

"But you must forgive them, Mrs. Rayburn. After all, that wretched young fellow is their son."

"I *have* forgiven them," she had answered in an angelic voice.

"Their behavior is the more astonishing," he had gone on vigorously, "because of the noble way you have behaved to that misguided boy—your brave asseveration, in spite of all that was proved against him, that you could not believe him to be guilty."

It was then that she had taken the opportunity to say, in a deeply troubled voice:

"He wants to see me, Sir John. Do you think I ought to see him? He was very, very fond of me once. But, oh! I do so dread the thought of seeing him!"

And the great counsel had shaken his head decidedly.

"You have already borne enough misery and torture over this horrible affair. You are in no way bound to see young Lynworth, and I'm amazed at his asking you to do so."

So she had written Godfrey Lynworth a letter, first showing it to Sir John, who had unwillingly passed it, while declaring it to be the noblest epistle ever written by a woman.

Enid had made so many rough copies of that letter that she knew it by heart, and she repeated it to herself now, this morning, rocking her slight body this way and that in the large bed.

DEAR GODFREY: I am ill, so I cannot come to you. Otherwise I would do so. You know that I believe you innocent, and I want now to tell you how *grateful* I am for all your kindness to me; for the love, however wrong it may have been, that you lavished on me.

ENID.

She had hoped the letter would give poor Godfrey pleasure: that he would read between the lines and see how sorry she was—how terribly sorry—that everything had fallen out, as it had fallen out. Indeed, she had twice underlined the word "*grateful*."

She suddenly felt that she could not go on remembering any more, so she took a bottle off the little table where her watch was laid, and measured from it a small dose into a medicine glass. They would wake her, surely, when the longed-for message came through.

Soon she was once more plunged into an uneasy slumber. But, alas, almost at once, she seemed again transported to that condemned cell, and this time, in addition to the warders, the governor of the prison, and the chaplain, there was there Sir Marcus Tryst, the man who had cross-examined her with such terrible severity and whom she hated as well as feared.

She listened, now, with a feeling of

indignation and horror to his cold, clear voice.

"I abjure you, Lynworth, to tell the truth for the sake of your father and of your poor mother, who have always believed you innocent."

There was a pause. Enid Rayburn clasped her hands together in supplication, and it was as if she knew that she was at once standing there at the door of the dreadful cell, and here in this quiet Sussex village, miles and miles away.

"It is as you have always thought it was, Sir Marcus. I die innocent, for Enid Rayburn poisoned her husband."

Small wonder that, outside the quiet bedroom, Miss Fidgett, already on her way down to breakfast, heard a fearful cry.

"No, no! That isn't true!"

She opened the door, and saw that Enid was asleep.

"Poor child, poor child," she murmured, "no wonder she has nightmare. Thank God that unhappy man is to be hanged to-day!"

More than an hour had gone by when there came a sharp knock at the door.

Enid Rayburn awoke with a stifled cry. She jumped straight out of bed and stood, her hands clasped together, waiting. Then came another knock.

"Come in!" she cried shrilly.

Miss Fidgett's old parlor maid came in and shut the door behind her. Enid had never liked the woman, and the woman had never liked her. It was a curious fact that most of the servants brought in contact with her did not care for Mrs. Rayburn.

"Mrs. Doghill is on the telephone, ma'am. Miss Fidgett is holding the line till you come."

Enid snatched up her periwinkle-blue satin dressing gown and wrapped it about her. Then she thrust her tiny white feet into slippers that matched the dressing gown, and rushed down to the hall, telling herself, not for the first

time, how foolish it was of her friend to have the telephone in so public a place as the hall.

Miss Fidgett, a comfortable, old-fashioned-looking woman, was standing, the telephone receiver to her ear. When she saw Enid Rayburn the words formed themselves on her lips: "It's all over," but she did not utter the words aloud; instead, she silently handed over the receiver and, turning into her sitting room, discreetly shut the door.

"Is that you, Jenny? Yes, yes! I can hear quite well."

With startling distinctness came the measured words that were being uttered seventy miles away: "It's all over, Enid. I could have telephoned twenty minutes ago. But I fortunately managed—as I told you I hoped to do—to speak to a reporter that was present. You will be glad to hear that it was all incredibly quick—not two minutes the man said, from when they first went into the cell to—you know when."

Mrs. Rayburn remained silent, trying to summon up courage to ask a certain question. The knowledge that the door of the servants' hall was close to the little table by which she was sitting was very present to her.

She heard the anxious words: "Are you there? Did you hear me?"

"Yes," she answered in a steady voice, "I heard you. But, Jenny! I want to ask you something." Her voice sank to a low whisper. "Was anything said?"

"Anything said?" repeated the voice at the other end.

Enid told herself angrily that Jenny had always been a very stupid woman—stupid as kind, plain women so often are!

"I mean did *he* say anything? Did he confess?"

"No, he said nothing. They seem to have hoped he would say something. But he remained absolutely silent."

There came an almost painful rush of relief over Enid Rayburn. She felt

for a moment as if she was going to faint. Then the color rushed back into her face, and she nerved herself to hear something disagreeable, for Mrs. Doghill's voice came again: "But Enid, I think you'd like to hear one more thing, my poor darling."

"What is it?"

"The reporter told me one very curious fact. He said that the warder who had charge of the poor fellow these last days is quite convinced that he was innocent! Isn't that strange? I told him—I hope you won't mind—that you had always said Godfrey Lynworth was absolutely incapable of doing so cruel a deed."

Enid remained silent. What a fool Jenny was, to be sure! How horrid it would be if the affair was reopened; turned into a mystery by one of the popular papers!

She heard a cross voice interject:

"You've had full six minutes. I can't allow you to have any more now. If you like to get through another call presently——"

Enid hung up the receiver and turned toward the sitting-room door behind which she knew her friend was waiting, full of sympathy and curiosity.

"Matty!" she muttered. "Matty, it's—it's——" Before she could say "all over," she had fallen fainting at the older woman's feet.

Miss Fidgett would not have believed an angel, had an angel come and told her that dear little Enid Rayburn had fainted not from anguish but from relief.

Two hours later she was back in her charming bed, having had an excellent breakfast, and looking so cheerful that even her faithful Matty felt a little shocked, and that though she herself had told dear Enid that she must now put the horrid past entirely behind her.

The door opened, and the old parlor maid came in with a silver salver on which lay a telegram. She handed it

to Mrs. Rayburn with a curious expression on her face.

"I'd best wait to see if there's an answer," she said.

Enid tore open the envelope:

Hope to be with you some time late this afternoon.

HENRY BONNINGTON.

The telegram had been sent from Paris at eight that morning and delayed in transmission.

"There is no answer," said Mrs. Rayburn, in her soft, pleasant voice. And then she lay back happy—happy at last.

All through those terrible weeks of suspense and of horror there had run for Enid Rayburn a wonderful, secret thread of romance. It had been started by a letter, written by herself, about ten days after the exhumation of her husband, and the subsequent awful revelation that he had died as the result of a large dose of arsenic. The letter had been addressed to a man called Henry Bonnington, at the time in Madeira watching at the bedside of a dearly loved dying sister.

Enid and her husband had met this wealthy, generous bachelor about a year before—oddly enough, through Miss Fidgett, who was a friend of his mother. He had made friends with them both, and had invited them to be his guests during a delightful trip on his big yacht to Greece.

There had been several other people on Bonnington's yacht, among them a girl named Alice Flint, whom Enid had hated from the first, for she had guessed that Miss Flint cared for Bonnington, and she feared that their host was slowly making up his mind to marry the girl. Luckily Miss Flint had had to join her mother in a town on the Italian coast. Then a delightful thing had happened! Bonnington had fallen in love with her, Enid Rayburn, in a crazy, headlong, almost boyish, way—though he was a very shrewd man of business. He had, however, behaved

in a way she couldn't make out, for it was as if he wished to keep himself from loving her; and though she had played him as a clever fisherman plays a fish, she had not, what she called to herself, "landed him."

But on the last day of their trip they had had it out, and he had spoken to her in a way that had amazed and also, it must be confessed, much irritated her.

"Look here!" he had exclaimed without preamble. "The day I became one and twenty I promised my old dad that I'd never make love to a married woman. Up to now I've kept my word; and I mean to keep it still, Enid. I love you—I can't help loving you—though I've fought against it, God knows. And it's too bad"—there had come a humorous twist over his face, a smile Enid Rayburn had not understood—"for I should have been happy enough with poor little Alice if I'd never met you. I must try and get over it; but meanwhile, my dear, I want you to think of me as a friend. I know what your husband is—a waster, and worse than a waster; but still he does care for you, and, if I were you, I'd try and make the best of him."

She had begun to cry. Her tears always had such a wonderful effect on men, and they had had an effect even on this queer man.

"Don't cry!" he had exclaimed. "I can't bear to see you cry! If you cry, I'll have to go away."

Quickly she dried her eyes, and it was well that she had, for he went on:

"It's your birthday next week. I heard you say so yesterday. So here's a little present for you. Spend it on yourself, and mind you don't let Hugo know about it, or he'll make you give him some of it!" He had handed her an envelope containing a bearer check for a thousand pounds made out to, and crossed by, himself.

As with real gratitude—for money

was a thing the value of which Enid Rayburn thoroughly understood—she faltered out her thanks, he suddenly bent forward and caught her roughly in his arms. They exchanged a long, long kiss—and then?

"There," cried the oddest man Enid had ever encountered, "I've broken my word! But it's the last time I'll do it. You're dangerous, young woman! I must keep away from you."

Even so, at intervals, she and Bonnington had exchanged letters. His had been funny letters; not love letters as she understood the term, but always, somehow, he had put in a word that made her understand that he was not "getting over it," as he had hoped to do; and in the last letter he had written to her before the terrible tragedy of her husband's sudden death, he had put, in a postscript: "I'm sorry to say my heart is still true to Poll."

In answer to her letter telling him of the awful and incredible thing which had happened, he had written very kindly. But not till after the English papers had reached Madeira, and he had understood the frightful predicament in which she found herself, had the tone of Bonnington's letters become suddenly warm and loverlike.

And he had proved his devotion in a way that really appealed to Enid Rayburn, for at intervals he had cabled to her considerable sums of money, while by every mail came letters expressing deep regret that he could not be with her through that dreadful time which had really only ended to-day.

And then, at last, about ten days ago, had come a telegram saying that his sister was dead, and that he was coming home.

All Bonnington's letters and telegrams had been sent to Mrs. Rayburn, care of Miss Fidgett, together with her other private correspondence. But the considerable sum of money he had cabled to her she had collected, unknown to

any one, at the general post office in London. How noble, how generous, how devoted he was, and what a wonderful life lay before her as the cherished, sheltered wife of a great business magnate!

As he walked up the gangway of the Channel boat at Folkestone Henry Bonnington's heart was full of two women—his dead sister, and the young widow to whom he was now on his way. Every fiber of him longed for Enid Rayburn, yet, even so, he felt that it would be indecent to speak of marriage to a woman who had become widowed so recently, and under such tragic, untoward circumstances.

During his weary journey home Bonnington had often wondered if all she had gone through had changed Enid from the deliciously pretty, kind-hearted, rather irresponsible little creature he remembered her as being, into something more like what he knew, deep in his heart, he would wish his wife to be. But her letters had grown shorter as his had grown longer, and had vaguely disappointed him.

But now, thank God, he was home! In a few hours he would be face to face with her. At that thought his whole being became irradiated with joy. Bonnington had always been a very simple, primitive man in his relations with women, for all that he was so able, shrewd, and determined in his dealings with men.

While his porter was looking for a fairly empty first-class smoker, he told himself that he might as well buy an evening paper. Strolling up to the bookstall, he glanced down at the evening placards, and then he experienced a very unpleasant shock, for "Lynworth dies game;" "Godfrey Lynworth executed;" "Lynworth pays the penalty," was all that met his eye.

Sharply he turned on his heel and hurried down the platform.

Godfrey Lynworth? How often had he tried to visualize the young man who had committed so dastardly a murder in order to free the woman he loved hopelessly, and without return, from the degradation of being tied to such a waster as had been Hugo Rayburn. Though the papers had been full of the wretched fellow's handsome face, Bonnington had no clear vision of him at all; and Enid had never mentioned the young man in any of her letters. Suddenly that fact seemed to him very strange.

What had been printed in huge letters on those placards caused him to realize, as he had not realized till now, the fact that his poor, lovely Enid could not but be all her life long, even after she had changed her name, a marked woman; one who would always be pointed at as the heroine of a great scandal.

Yet stop! With a rush of delight of which he felt ashamed he told himself that, under the circumstances, would it not be not only right, but reasonable, that Enid should marry him almost at once? Once she was his wife he could take her away to some quiet place on the Continent, while people forgot the terrible crime of which she had been the innocent cause. Mercifully her identity would be shielded by his name.

"I've got you a place at last, sir! It's in a carriage reserved for a party of three. But one of the two gentlemen saw the name on your bag, and he said he knew you, sir, and would be very pleased if you'd share his carriage."

Bonnington felt a touch of quick annoyance. He didn't want to see any one he knew just now; but when he got up into the railway carriage and he saw that his hospitable friend was a certain Francis Fox with whom he had only a very slight business acquaintance, he felt reassured. As the two shook hands he said quietly:

"I'm just back from Madeira; my sister died there ten days ago."

The other murmured a word of sympathy, and then he said:

"I expect you'd rather not be introduced to my two friends?" And Bonnington saw on the other side of the railway carriage a thin, middle-aged man with whose face he felt vaguely familiar—could he be a well-known actor?—and a middle-aged lady with a clever, plain, good-humored face.

"The man's Sir Marcus Tryst; the lady is Lady Annabel FitzCharles. We all happened to meet in Paris."

Bonnington settled himself in a corner seat, away from the other three, but, before opening his book, he glanced at Sir Marcus Tryst. He knew now why the man's face was vaguely familiar. Tryst was the famous K. C. who had defended Godfrey Lynworth, and he remembered with a feeling of recoil the way Tryst had cross-questioned Enid Rayburn concerning her own and her late husband's money difficulties.

The train slid out of the harbor station, and Lady Annabel FitzCharles—leaned forward:

"I see that that poor young fellow, Godfrey Lynworth, was hanged this morning, Sir Marcus. I had hoped against hope that something would happen to prevent it. My sister knows his people quite well. She told me the other day that he was so very clever, and had had a brilliant career before him."

Bonnington's friend, Francis Fox, looked significantly at the famous advocate.

"I suppose it's not etiquette, even now, Tryst, to ask you if you really thought that young chap innocent?"

"I'm convinced that he was innocent!"

The answer was rapped out at once in quick, sharp tones.

Lady Annabel again leaned forward.

"But, if that's true, Sir Marcus, what an awful thing that he should have been hanged! I thought that there wasn't a doubt of his guilt!"

"I'm willing to bet you a hundred to one, Lady Annabel, that within, say, a year—though I think it will be much sooner—we shall see, tucked away in some corner of our daily paper, a paragraph informing us that: 'The beautiful Mrs. Rayburn, whose husband died under tragic circumstances, is about to be married, very quietly, to Mr. Popsy-Wopsy, a gentleman of wealth and position!'"

Bonnington moved slightly in his seat. He would have liked to strike across the face the sneering devil who had just uttered those words. But he knew that, if not for his own, then for Enid's sake, he must refrain from even saying a word in her defense. So he flicked open the French paper, which had been brought along by the porter among his other things, and hid himself behind it.

"What we look for in murder," went on Sir Marcus more quietly, "is motive. Poor Godfrey Lynworth had no reason to wish that futile fool, Hugo Rayburn, dead, for Mrs. Rayburn was already his mistress."

The stranger in the corner made a sudden movement, and Sir Marcus looked round for a moment, while Lady Annabel murmured:

"I had no idea of that!"

"Perhaps I'm a brute to reveal it, for the one thought of that unfortunate fellow, Lynworth, was to prevent this from coming out during the course of the trial. It is only known as a certainty to a very small circle of people. But to resume—those two were, as I have said, lovers, though the woman was obviously getting tired of Lynworth. As for Rayburn's part in the affair? Well, I never knew him! But you may remember that a very affectionate letter, written by him from Newmarket to his

wife, only a few days before his death, was put in? I hold the view that he was ignorant, not complaisant."

"What sort of a woman is Mrs. Rayburn—really?" asked Lady Annabel.

"She is one of those women whom it would be a compliment to call immoral," answered Sir Marcus incisively. "She is what it's the fashion nowadays to call a-moral. I found out a good deal about the fair Enid while I was getting up the case for that unfortunate young man. Up to the very end, I hoped he would, at any rate, allow sufficient suspicion to be cast on her to give him the benefit of the doubt. But Lynworth was like iron. He would never discuss her; and he charged me most solemnly not once, but several times, to avoid any allusion to her that could be avoided, during the course of my speech for the defense. When I fought his battle I was fighting with my hands tied behind my back."

"If he was innocent, as you believe, d'you think he knew that Mrs. Rayburn poisoned her husband?"

"He must have known it! But he pretended to take the view that Rayburn committed suicide. The man was practically penniless. Between them, the husband and wife had got through about thirty thousand pounds since their marriage."

"Then you think Mrs. Rayburn was in love with some one else?" interjected Mr. Fox.

"Nothing of the kind! I think she found the sort of life she was leading intolerable, and that, among the many men who had made love to her in the last year or two, she marked down some rich man as more than a possible—a probable, almost a certain—husband, were she only free. We discovered that she had made great efforts to persuade Rayburn to consent to an arranged divorce a few months before the wretched fellow's death. But he refused, unluckily for himself, for he adored the woman."

"But how did she procure the poison, Tryst?" asked Mr. Fox. "Surely the arsenic was traced to Lynworth's possession—or d'you think he gave it to Mrs. Rayburn?"

"When the two became lovers," answered Sir Marcus grimly, "Lynworth hired two rooms from a friend of his—a man who had a slum practice. These two rooms, which were always let, and which helped to pay their owner's rent, were part of a surgery, though they had a separate entrance. I think you can guess *now*, when and where Mrs. Rayburn procured the poison."

"And have you any suspicion as to the happy man who will be her second?" asked Lady Annabel. She smiled—Bonnington from his corner saw that she actually smiled—as she asked the question.

"No! There you have me! But some one has been supplying her with money during the last few months. I have not been able to discover who it is; but I have very little doubt that it is the man for whose sake she committed her foul crime."

"Then you think she had an accomplice?" put in Mr. Fox.

"Good heavens, no, Fox! I think nothing of the kind! The man who is giving her money, the man whose wife she'll probably become, doubtless thinks her an angel, as seem to do most of the fools who live in this island. And, mind you, I think it's quite possible that henceforth Enid Rayburn will run straight. She's had her fill of queer ways, as well as her fill of lovers. Also, she's been through a very bad time. She must have dreaded up to this very morning that Lynworth might give her away. I was present at a most painful meeting between the poor boy and his father. That was the only time he broke down. But though he sobbed—sobbed like a child—he shook his head, and swore that he believed her innocent. It was his poor old father who did a

good deal of the amateur detective work which brought some of the facts I have told you to my notice. I may say that in every case I verified what the old man said, and it was always true."

"Then Lynworth never said a word, even to you?" said Lady Annabel in a low voice; she was becoming affected by the other's emotion.

"Never!" replied Sir Marcus emphatically. "To the very end Lynworth kept up the farce that Rayburn had committed suicide because of his money troubles."

The train drew up in the station where Bonnington was to change for the Sussex village where Enid Rayburn was staying with their mutual friend, kind and rather foolish Matilda Fidgett. But he did not move. He remained sitting on in his corner seat, feeling ill and numb. Not till he stepped out onto the platform at the London station did he suddenly remember that his luggage had, of course, gone on, without him, to the wayside station in Sussex for which he had been bound.

He paid the excess fare on his ticket, and then he went to the telegraph office. For the last time in his life he wrote Enid's name:

Mrs. Rayburn. Baycombe Manor. Farnaker. Sussex: Prevented coming to-day. Will be with you some time to-morrow.

He was a brave man, and so it never occurred to him that he need never see her again.

Feeling in a maze of anguish and horror—though not of doubt, for he had been convinced—he wandered out of the station, not knowing what to do or where to go, for he was no Londoner. And then he remembered, with a sudden lightening of the heart, that his old friends, Mrs. Flint and her daughter, were in town. They had sent him a very kind telegram on hearing of his sister's death, and so he threw their address to a cabman.

It was late afternoon before Bonnington reached Baycombe Manor the next day, for he had had an interview with his London solicitor, and he had also made a short call on his banker. Though in a sense the day he had spent had been a peaceful, even a happy day, he looked haggard, stern, and sad.

Miss Fidgett, who was the first to greet him in the pretty, upstairs boudoir of her old house, was struck by that sad, stern look; and she told herself that so devoted a brother would surely make a good husband. She knew, or thought she knew, that he loved her sorely tried, delightful young friend, Enid Rayburn. Mrs. Rayburn had told her that morning how touchingly kind Henry Bonnington had been to her.

"Considering all she had gone through, our dear Enid is wonderfully well," she exclaimed. "She was in a dreadful state of nerves after that wretched young man's conviction, and I really wondered what would happen to her yesterday morning. She fainted, Harry, on hearing that all was over! But I have persuaded her that she must put the past behind her, and forget, as far as she can, the whole story. After all, Hugo Rayburn was a poor sort of a fellow—no husband for a woman like Enid."

Miss Fidgett would have liked to add just a word of affectionate sympathy and understanding, but she refrained.

"Matty, I would prefer not to see Mrs. Rayburn alone," he said abruptly.

Miss Fidgett looked uncomfortable, as well as very much surprised.

"Enid particularly begged me to allow her to see you alone," she murmured.

"Then may I see her now, at once? I've a train to catch back to town under an hour from now."

"I'll go and fetch her." She wondered what could be the matter. Perhaps Enid imagined that Harry Bonnington liked her. Mrs. Rayburn's

hostess knew how kind, how generous a man, Bonnington was. She tried to prepare her friend for his strange, almost rude manner.

"He looks far from well, my dear; remember to speak to him of his poor sister."

Enid had a sweet temper—it was one of her real qualities—but, even so, she shrugged her shoulders a little pettishly.

Still, when she walked into the room where the man she now considered her lover was waiting for her, she told herself with a shock of surprise that Matty had been right; it was of his dead sister, not of her, that Bonnington's heart was full.

As he looked at her with a strange, slow scrutiny, there came over her heart a slight feeling of misgiving. Yet she knew that she looked very young, very lovely, very appealing, in her plain, black dress.

As she held out her hand, and as he took it in his, she exclaimed involuntarily:

"How cold your hand is!"

He muttered:

"I'm tired—tired."

And there was a somber look on his stern face.

"I felt so sad, even in the midst of my own troubles, when I got your telegram about your sister," she said prettily.

He put up his hand.

"Please don't speak of her."

Involuntarily she exclaimed:

"I beg your pardon."

He remained silent for what seemed to Enid a long time, and then, in a curiously detached tone, he asked her:

"Do you remember Alice Flint?"

Enid looked at him; it was a quick, troubled glance.

"D'you mean the girl who was on the yacht last year? Yes, I remember her, now you mention her."

"She was my sister's dearest friend," he said slowly. "I saw her in town last night, and we are now engaged to be married."

And then he could not but admire, while loathing her, for swiftly she exclaimed:

"If that is so, I wish you joy, Mr Bonnington! And I want to thank you very, very sincerely for all you've done for me."

"I want to do something more." His voice was almost inaudible now; and again there followed a long silence between them. Then, in a firm voice, he went on: "I've arranged for ten thousand pounds to be placed to your account in any bank that you may select. I know you must need a change—"

And then, at last, she did break down; she began to sob bitterly, while telling herself, in the depths of her troubled heart, that men were strange, fickle, incomprehensible brutes.

"It's been terrible, terrible! And I long to get away, though every one has been so good, so kind, so understanding during this dreadful time. I have dear friends in India, so I think I shall go there for the winter."

She dried her tears, and again he looked straight at her. It was a poignant, suffering look—that of an accomplice as well as that of a victim—and all at once she realized that he knew.

The final sentence had been spoken.



RADIO GOLF, the fad of the crowd, has become the pastime of royalty, and for that purpose a choice radio set, specially designed for the use of the English royal family, has been installed in Buckingham Palace.



Intrusion

By Jessie Henderson

Author of "The Web,"
"Overplayed," etc.



PART II

AS one golden day slid into the next, powdering the town with mellow autumn haze till Sylvia's old brick house glowed dusky rose above its fine white doorway, the girl caught herself wondering which Nelson was real. Sometimes the Nelson she had seen by candlelight in the dismantled house seemed as ghostlike as the city itself appeared in the misty September sunset. It was hard to realize that this long, beautifully shaped hand helping her out of the car or offering a cigarette was the same one which had thrust itself into Uncle David's wall safe.

Dual personality? She wondered again. Or just a plain, cold-blooded crook with the accident of charming manners?

"But there must be some good explanation!" Sylvia clamored at her reflection in the oval boudoir mirror.

The thought had occurred to her often enough before. This, however, was the first time it had wrung the words from her lips, and when she heard her own voice with an unmistakable catch in it, Sylvia very slowly took her hands down from her hair and stared at her own reflection.

It was a reflection worth the look. Sylvia's bronze hair floated behind her head like a dark nimbus, touched with high lights from the many-paned casement windows. The subtle blue silk and foamy lace of her negligee emphasized the untamed Lloyd color in her

cheeks and contrived to give an ever-deeper amber to her eyes. Against the airy, glazed-chintz curtains and the Colonial maple of the ancient room, she gleamed like a flame.

Upon the creator of the effect, however, the effect was lost. Beyond the mirror Sylvia saw that which drained the color bit by bit from her face and sent the coppery head down, shamed, upon her hands.

"Oh, no!" she whispered. "No; I couldn't be in love with a man so—dubious."

The word was a direct throwback to the one New England Lloyd who had brought a sweet primness into the grandfather segment of the family. Sylvia smiled awry as the word came unbidden. Being a modern, and accustomed to giving facts their correct names, she raised her head to look with unmasked scorn into the mirrored eyes.

"Nevertheless," she said upon a gasp, "I am."

In fleet review there passed through her mind a rather long procession—the men who had made serious love to Sylvia Lloyd Leverett. Had she turned away, smiling, from honest Americans, a titled European or two, and even—the dimple at the corner of her mouth came to life for an instant—even a Persian princeling widely known as the "Sheik," only to grow serious over a nobody whose eyes looked honesty it-

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self, except when they were looking into somebody else's safe?

"But," she repeated helplessly, "there must be some good explanation."

Why didn't he make it, then? Her common sense asked the question with relentless iteration. Why? The query flew back and forth as her fingers twisted the coppery cloud of hair into the soft, loose coiffure which Nelson told her he admired. Why didn't he just say: "Sylvia, there's something——" Or: "I don't know what you'll think of me, but, Sylvia, there's something——" Why did he come to Uncle David's house in the night, go through Uncle David's papers, and why, why, why in the name of heartbreak, didn't he——

"Oh, I don't know why! I don't know! I don't know!" she half shrieked at the mirror, and raced into her prettiest frock and down the stairs to meet him.

They ended the afternoon at Martha Norton's, for tea. There was that in the reflective eye which Martha cocked at them which made Sylvia drag her hostess into a corner, determined to find out something more about this Albanian tourist chauffeur, this Virginian gentleman burglar.

"A poor relation of the Smedley Nelsons of Caldecott, you said," Sylvia began.

Martha giggled, and the sound brought a higher sweep of the famous Lloyd red to Sylvia's face.

"I never said any such thing," Martha retorted. "He must have said that, himself. It's great to see you interested in a man at last, Sylvia."

"But, naturally"—Sylvia was coolness itself—"naturally I'm interested in a man about whom you've told me such interesting things. Such a good friend of yours."

"But, naturally!" Martha mocked. "How do you make your eyes take on that ingenuous look? Yes, Dick used to

be a friend of mine. He's only an acquaintance now. I never see him."

Ignoring the shaft, Sylvia continued her inquiry.

"He told me he was just a poor relation of the Caldecott Nelsons."

"Poor relation is, so to speak, relative. The unfortunate chap hasn't over a couple of hundred thousand a year, and I bet you he won't inherit a penny more than fifteen million when his great-aunt Smedley dies. Compared with the seventy-five and ninety million hand-outs that the other Nelsons got from their grandpapa, I suppose he's entitled to call himself a pauper."

Sylvia bit her lip. Then even the excuse of being temporarily in need of funds wasn't his.

"But he told me he came back from Europe 'broke!'"

Martha patted the girl's hand.

"Nice little credulous Sylvia! You see, Dick's a quaint character. He has an idea that, even when a man has inherited wealth, he ought to earn his own living now and then, just for the discipline of it. And he went to Europe on funds he had earned as assistant in an architect's office; he's a wiz at drawing—you've noticed his lovely hands?"

Yes; Sylvia had noticed his lovely hands.

"Of course, what he earned wasn't an awful lot. He truly was just about broke when I picked him up in Albania, but he was thoroughly enjoying the experience. He even made me pay him a salary as chauffeur."

Sylvia looked aghast. What cheapness!

"Oh, he gave it all back to me in the loveliest lavallière you ever saw. One big, whopping crystal, exquisitely carved. But—well, that's what Dick is like. Please marry him. He's a peach."

Brilliantly pink, Sylvia got up.

"Really, Martha, you take a good deal for granted."

"Yes," Martha agreed placidly, kissing her good-by. Sylvia didn't like the twinkle in Martha's eye at all.

"I must be terribly in love," Sylvia told herself honestly, "because I'm so irritable. I've heard it makes you cranky."

But her wrath vanished like a sparkle of frost before the autumn sun the minute Nelson turned to her with his unforgettable smile. It was atrocious of him to be so attractive and at the same time so mysterious. It wasn't fair. The girl made up her mind that never, never would she let him know she cared. Not unless he confessed everything, without urging or hint from her.

The decision made Sylvia a little bit silent on the ride home through streets that glinted as though the clear air had flaked them here and there with gold. The buttressed towers of the town rose gently against a gentle, opalescent sky, things of as poignant beauty as mountain peaks. At their feet, the shadows were deep blue, but free sunset light bathed the little park in which stood Sylvia's house. In vain the girl tried to get into tune with the soothing peace of the place and hour. Her turbulent heart was as untamed by it as a troubled sea is unsmoothed by the twilight.

"You'll come in?" she said to Nelson, and with the words a sudden angry resolution came to her. She would give him his chance at once. Why wait longer? Let the man prove himself, one way or the other. And, if he proved himself dishonest, she would tear him out—this was the metaphor that slid into her mind—she would tear him out of her life, even though she tore her heart out, also.

Firm little teeth set in her upper lip, she led him into Uncle David's library.

The long, high room was dusky at this hour. Through the open windows came vagrant little puffs of fragrance from the strip of garden dividing this house from its neighbor. It was a room

full of tranquillity, and the tranquillity obscurely made Sylvia's mood the angrier.

Switching on the table light with its cream-and-brown, plaited shade that gave enough, but not too much, of radiance, Sylvia uttered an impatient exclamation.

"Stupid! I meant to ask Marie to clean those turquoise bracelets. I'm wearing them this evening, to the Trudeau dance. Make yourself comfortable, Dick, while I get them out and give them to her."

She walked deliberately across the room, drew aside a precious length of Gobelin, and disclosed the wall safe. Behind her, over by the lamplit table, Nelson stiffened. She could feel the constraint that gripped him.

"Want to see some pretty things?" she called. He hesitated. Sylvia was on her knees before the safe, alertly twisting the knob, unraveling the combination. "Oh, of course, if you're not interested——" she flung over her shoulder with a shaky laugh when his hesitancy became too obvious.

"Of course I'm interested," he replied quickly, and strode over to where she knelt.

"I have an awful time remembering this combination," she remarked after a moment of uncomfortable silence. "For years and years Uncle David kept the combination unchanged. But, after I returned, I had it altered so that now it's a new one and hard to remember."

She glanced up as she spoke and was surprised at the odd, strained look upon Nelson's face. He felt it incumbent upon him to make some reply.

"I suppose it is wise not to keep one combination too long."

"Some one who knew the old combination might break in, you know," Sylvia said clearly.

Oh, why couldn't he say: "Sylvia, once I opened this safe. I'll tell you the reason——"

But, no! He stood looking down at her fingers while they twirled the knob. Perhaps he was trying to read the new combination. More likely he was watching for the little door to swing open so that he could see whether the safe now contained whatever it was he had looked for in vain that night a month ago.

Was it really one short month since she had waked to find him at this safe? And in that one month, had she really grown so accustomed to his frank blue eyes, his brilliant smile, that the thought of losing them was like a knife thrust? Of course, she reflected, they had met almost every day. It had been an intensive acquaintance, equal to six months of the ordinary kind. And not a word of explanation from him in all that time; not one word!

Wrath blazed again in her face as the door at last swung open. It seemed to her that Nelson leaned forward eagerly. Sylvia drew out the Florentine jewel box which was a jewel in itself, and lifted the gorgeous lid.

"Nice, don't you think?" she inquired, holding a loop of yellow diamonds against her bronze hair. The stones were marvelous, but it was not the stones which brought that spurt of light into Nelson's glance. Sylvia hurriedly returned the gems to their place. Heavens! She had seen that look in the eyes of men about to propose. Not yet, she cried frantically to her heart; not yet!

"There are some very good sapphires, too," she managed to say, through the half-frightened flutter in her throat; "and, of course, the Lloyd pearls." She let them slide smoothly through her fingers. "And here are those tarnished bracelets."

With the big Oriental turquoise-and-silver shackles in one hand and the Florentine box in the other, Sylvia scrambled to her feet.

"Here!" she said, thrusting the jewel casket into Nelson's hands. "Look at

them, if you'd like to, while I find Marie. She's upstairs somewhere. I don't really know what's in the box." Infinite cunning lay behind that remark, and Sylvia topped it with one more clever still: "Just put it back into the safe when you're through looking, will you?"

There! It probably wasn't anything in the jewel box that he sought, but putting the box back into the safe would afford him an excellent opportunity to rummage. Sylvia darted from the room before Nelson could speak the half-formed protest. Running upstairs, she tossed the bracelets to Marie and at once began to steal with utmost caution down the stairs again.

Her feet made no sound on the thick stair carpet. By leaning across the balustrade at a point midway down, she could see past the library door to the Gobelin panel and the wall safe.

Cold little fingers clasping the mahogany rail, she crouched, hating herself for watching but determined to watch. Nelson stood where she had left him, absently running the sapphire necklace through his hand. His eyes were not on the casket, but on the square black opening beside the tapestry. For a long while he remained almost motionless. Then with a slow step, as if hypnotized, he walked toward the wall. Sylvia heard the lid of the jewel casket snap shut. Nelson leaned forward and opened the casket inside the safe.

Then he stood peering into the tiny black cavern while Sylvia's heart stopped beating. His hand went out; his hand went inside the opening—To the girl on the stairway it seemed as if an icy wind blew over her. If he so much as unfolded one of Uncle David's papers, she would never see Nelson again. Never! This should be the supreme test.

For an instant Nelson stood with one hand out. Then he withdrew that hand with a jerk, slammed the safe door,

wheeled toward the table, and sank into a chair. She saw him hide his eyes, and the sight constricted her heart, squeezing it with pity for the man and shame for herself.

Upstairs again she crept, and in a minute came somewhat noisily down. Nelson rose from the chair at her entrance, his face grim, his eyes dreary. With fingers that quivered, Sylvia got a cigarette from the teakwood box on the table. Nelson lighted the match, and stepped toward her.

Head flung back, cigarette in lips, the girl looked up at him, troubled, penitent, flushed. To both of them came the recollection of their first meeting, that day a month ago at Martha's, when what had been a casual moment of cigarette lighting proved the prelude to—to this.

Sylvia stared into the man's sober face, and he stared down into hers while the match burned itself out between his fingers. Slowly Sylvia took the cigarette from her mouth, and as slowly Nelson folded her in his arms and kissed her. It seemed to Sylvia that she had been waiting for that kiss since time began.

He would tell now. In a moment he would begin to explain. Held against the shoulder of his rough, tobacco-scented coat, Sylvia knew everything was going to be all right now.

"To think some other man might have got you!" he murmured. "To think of me tramping round Europe while other men paid court to you. It's a lesson to me. I'll never let you out of my sight again."

"Foolish!" Sylvia raised joyous eyes. Now he would begin to tell, and it would be so clear, so simple.

But, no! Here he was talking of a wedding day. And then, with a start, of the Trudeaus' dance. He must hurry to his club and get into dinner clothes, but he'd be back in a jiffy.

Sylvia turned very white. He didn't

intend to tell! She averted her head when he tried to kiss her once more.

"Please, Dick. I shouldn't have let you. I'm—I'm not going to marry you, Dick."

"What?"

She looked up at him bravely, amber eyes cold.

He tried to take her in his arms.

"Don't dare say you aren't in love with me!"

"I love you, Dick." Her tones fell lifelessly, but she would not dodge the truth. "Probably I'll get over it, in time."

"But, honey girl——"

"I'm not going to marry you," she said in a tiny voice, and fled.

It was an exceedingly chill, courteous young man, paling as he spoke, whom Sylvia met by chance now and then in the next few days. Was it more torture to see him thus, or not to see him at all? Sylvia took to crying instead of sleeping. Sometimes the tears blinded her even as she walked down the street. They blurred her vision one afternoon as she strolled aimlessly across a corner of Central Park and, her vision still blurred, she walked directly into Nelson's arms.

He kissed her, without waiting to see whether any one was looking.

"What fools we've been! Prowling round the Park alone when we might have prowled together. We don't deserve to be in love."

In spite of her resolutions, Sylvia sent him a tearful smile. With sweet frankness she gazed at him.

"It is painful, isn't it?" she confessed.

"Lots of things are painful," he replied. "Sylvia, I don't know what you'll think of me, but there's something——"

"Oh!" cried Sylvia, clinging to his coat lapels. "Oh, Dick, go on! I'm so happy!"

His face darkened.

"Happy? My dear, I'd die rather

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than make you less so. But I've got to tell you."

And at last he told.

"Yes?" Sylvia murmured. "But what were you looking for? You didn't find it."

"First, dear, let me say that it didn't seem exactly like breaking into some one's house. Of course that's what I did. But I'd visited Stewart there so many times. Once he and I broke in the same way, coming home late without a key and the servants all sound asleep. It didn't seem——"

Sylvia gave a happy laugh.

"You didn't seem, either," she retorted. "You looked less like a burglar than one would suppose, under the circumstances." Nelson started. "I saw you," Sylvia chuckled from his shoulder. "I had been asleep on the library couch."

He looked at her in amazement.

"But why—later—when we met, didn't you have me arrested? Or something?"

Sylvia laughed again.

"Dearest, it was more fun to try to find out by myself."

"Fun?" he cried. "Fun?" His face was convulsed in sudden anguish. "Did you think I broke in as a joke?"

"But why, then?" Sylvia asked gently.

When he replied, she felt numbly that she was sinking down, down into deep waters; into waters so deep and dark that no kindly hand could ever pull her out again.

"This will hurt you, dear," he began. "It's about your cousin, Stewart. He and I used to be friends, until I found out his ideas on certain things; on women, for example. My little sister—— Sylvia, perhaps you don't know Stewart's ideas about women?"

"I know them," Sylvia answered in a tone so odd that Nelson glanced at her white face again before he resumed his story.

"My little sister thinks she's in love

with Stewart. They're engaged. They are planning to be married soon." Sylvia put a hand to her throat and Nelson, reaching up, pulled it down and held it in his own. "I'm sorry to speak this way of your cousin, but I'd rather see my sister dead than married to him. She's fascinated by his dare-devil manner. He is handsome, I'll admit, and he has a way with women. You've noticed?"

"Yes," Sylvia whispered.

"Nothing I can say will make her believe that he's a rotter. The utmost I could do was make her promise she wouldn't marry him inside two months—or till I had time to come here for the proof."

There was a little silence. To Sylvia's ears the rustle of the leaves was a cry of anguish, the voicing of that cry her heart dared not utter.

"Without saying anything to Stewart, because to tip him off would be giving him a chance to destroy the evidence, I took the next train north. I had two months' leeway, but I didn't know how much time I might need. If I couldn't find it here, I might have to go abroad."

"What——" Sylvia began, but choked on the question.

"I went at once to Stewart's old home—your house, Sylvia. I had an idea it might be in that wall safe. Once, when Stewart was full of gin, he said something that made me think this. But I couldn't find it that night. So I went to Martha's next day, to try to find out what friends Stewart might have had—women friends, you know. This was a woman of his own class. I hoped to discover her name somehow, and where she is to-day. Stewart had said that—afterward—she went abroad."

The girl at his side raised such a stricken face that he gathered her against his shoulder to hide the look in her eyes.

"I'm sorry to tell you all this, Sylvia. My idea, of course, was simply to get

the woman to tell Enid, my sister, the truth about Stewart. The affair must have been kept pretty quiet, though. Martha never heard about it. Oh, she'd heard about plenty of the messes Stewart got into, but not about any with a really high-class girl. This particular mess must have been pretty bad, because Stewart told me that night, when he was so drunk, that his Uncle David would have thrown him out of the house because of it, except for the scandal this would have caused.

"Stewart knew the combination of the wall safe. He told it to me, and it stuck vaguely in my mind—enough of it so that I managed to open the thing. Stewart, that night, was all for getting the letter out and burning it, but I persuaded him to go to bed. He admitted he'd got hold of the safe combination through a trick, and had hunted several times for the letter but couldn't find it."

The girl spoke at last.

"Letter?"

"Why, yes. A letter from the woman to Stewart, begging him to marry her."

"Oh!" cried Sylvia, hiding her face.

"Oh, no, no!"

"Rotten, wasn't it—the whole thing? Did your uncle ever mention such a letter, dear?"

Sylvia shook her head.

"No one—I never knew about any letter."

Nelson's face twisted.

"That letter means more than life itself to me," he said in a low tone. "It means more than anything, except you. Sylvia, will you help me find it?"

Startled, Sylvia's eyes opened wide. The look she gave him was full of dismay.

"Oh, no, Dick! I couldn't do that."

Dick's frown was more of bewilderment than of disappointment.

"But, dear, I've told you it's absolutely the only thing that will make Enid give Stewart up."

Sylvia's hands clenched in her lap.

"I'm sorry, Dick," she said pitifully. "I couldn't do it. Truly, I couldn't."

His face darkened. Almost without knowing it, he moved away from her.

"Really, Sylvia, if you admire Stewart enough to protect him in a case like this, I can't say much for your discrimination." She had not dreamed his tones could be so cold.

"It isn't that," Sylvia cried. "I don't admire Stewart. I hate him!"

Nelson's smile was sardonic.

"I do hate him!" Sylvia insisted. "There are good reasons—" A bit frightened, she changed the sentence. "I can't do what you ask, Dick. There's a reason why I can't. Please, please don't ask me."

He got up.

"Never fear. I'll annoy you no more with my troubles." He seemed not to notice the clutching little hand at his elbow. They began to walk toward the Avenue, Nelson with head up and chin set hard; Sylvia with her eyes on the ground and her winsome mouth quivering.

"Isn't"—she began with a timidity new to Sylvia Leverett—"isn't there something else you could do?"

"Indeed, yes," he rejoined. "I can go back to Virginia and have it out with Stewart. I'm leaving to-night."

The tone, more than the words, halted Sylvia in the path.

"What do you mean?" she asked uncertainly.

"I'll get the truth out of Stewart, or kill him trying."

Despairing, Sylvia foresaw it all. There would be a fight, and in a fight so passionate there was no telling what might happen. The least that could happen would be a confession from Stewart, with names, proofs—everything.

"No, Dick; don't do that," Sylvia said after a moment. She breathed hard but her voice was under control. "I was wrong, putting family pride before

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your—your necessity. I can see now how it must have looked to you."

He melted at once before her repentance.

"My sister means a lot to me, Sylvia. More than family pride."

"Of course."

"I realize it's asking a lot of you. But, Sylvia, when I think of my kid sister throwing herself away on that beast, I can't feel that I'm asking you too much."

The girl hid her eyes against his sleeve. Little did he know how much he was asking!

"What do you want me to do?" she murmured.

"I was thinking perhaps that letter might be hidden in an old trunk or box, up in the storeroom, or some such place? Could we look there, dear?"

"To-night." Oh, why had she not known about that letter?

"And, if we find it, Sylvia——"

"If they found it!"

"I'll show it to no one but Enid and Stewart."

Sylvia knew that having it shown to any one would be something worse than death for the woman who had written it. Her desperate mind half formed a plan. If the letter turned up, a wire to Stewart would get him out of the way; Stewart was clever; he might devise some method. Meanwhile, spar for time; tide over the present crisis.

"We will hunt to-night," she said again.

In the big storeroom there were trunks and boxes and an old desk. They spent an evening and a day going through the desk, and another day going through the other possible hiding places. Sylvia shook out papers and letters with a feverish zeal. The reward was nothing.

"Stewart may have been merely boasting," she suggested hopefully. "He may not have told the truth at all."

"It was more than a boast," Dick responded. "There was truth behind it somewhere."

They had gone downstairs to the library after emptying the last box of its yellowed contents. Wary in body and spirit though she was, Sylvia sat up straight on the edge of the couch, watchful, tense.

Dick went on, half to himself.

"Without the letter, half my case is lost. Stewart's a nervy brute. Unless I produce the letter, he may deny everything in spite of all I can do. Perhaps I can choke it out of him, but without the letter—I honestly don't believe I can."

A little flame of exultation leaped for a moment to Sylvia's amber eyes. It was true. Without the letter, and with a wire of warning from herself to Stewart, Dick's chances of forcing a confession were slim indeed. Perhaps it had been silly of her to be so frightened of an encounter between Stewart and Dick, yef at least she had sparred for time till Dick, cooling down, had come partially to her own viewpoint.

"It would be unwise to force a fight," she began.

But Dick's glance had strayed again to the tapestry panel behind which lay the wall safe.

"We were in this very room when Stewart boasted. I can't tell you what he said, dear—incredible stuff. He told me everything but the woman's name. Seemed afraid to tell that; said his uncle had threatened him if he did."

The girl, tense on the edge of the couch, stirred in protest.

"Can't we talk about something else, Dick?"

Nelson sounded reproachful.

"I'm sorry, dear. But it's the biggest thing in life to me, except yourself." Again he looked toward the tapestry. "Right in there," Stewart said; 'right in there is a letter that would bust society open, if it ever got out.'" He

walked over to the tapestry, pulled it aside, and stood with musing gaze. "He *must* have meant that the letter was in here. Your uncle kept it as a threat over Stewart's head. Shall we look through the safe?"

"Uncle"—Sylvia had to stop and swallow—"Uncle David probably destroyed it."

The look Nelson gave her was a curious one.

"Don't you want me to hunt through the safe?"

"If you wish." Sylvia went over and began to twirl the little knob. After all, Nelson had gone through the safe once and found nothing. What danger in letting him search again?

They lifted out documents, a memorandum book with "David Lloyd" written across it in strong, bold writing. In a tiny drawer lay the miniature of Sylvia's young aunt. Nelson took it in his hand.

"I vaguely recall seeing this, the night I burglarized."

Sylvia made no reply. Her hand, wandering idly over the drawer knobs, paused as it frozen. Under the guise of an ornamental strip of metal her fingers detected in the pattern a bronze acorn which moved beneath her touch. Why, of course! When she looked at it more closely, the acorn was obviously the handle to another drawer, so cleverly concealed in plain sight that only the merest chance would lead to its discovery.

In a flash of understanding—a flash which blazed like a lightning stroke across her brain—Sylvia understood. There really had been a letter. Uncle David had hidden it in this well-concealed drawer. Only Uncle David knew of the hiding place.

In the instant that her hand hovered over the acorn knob, Sylvia told herself this conjecture was only a conjecture after all. Yet the letter might be there, separated by only a thin plate of

steel from her eyes, and Nelson's. She must know. She must look.

"There seems to be nothing we've missed," Nelson remarked with a profound sigh.

"Except cigarettes," Sylvia answered with a lightness that drew from the man a quick frown. "No, Dick; not those. There's a special brand in my coat. Do you mind? I tossed my coat on that long table by the stairway."

The instant Dick's back was turned, Sylvia pulled the acorn knob. Silently a shallow drawer slid out. Inside it lay a single sheet of paper with a few lines in a hand as familiar as her own; a few lines only, beginning with a frantic: "Stewart, I cannot believe you would desert me now——"

Sylvia read no more. It would take Nelson some time yet to rummage through the pockets of her coat out in the hall. She snatched a box of matches from the table, struck one, and held the flame to the thin, jagged sheet. As the flame caught brightly, she noticed how the note had been torn, as if snatched from a reluctant hand. Had Uncle David wrested it from Stewart?

The slip of paper crumpled black, down to the corner Sylvia held. There was a step from the hall. Sylvia dropped the brittle fragments into the drawer, thrusting it back as Nelson returned to the room.

"I couldn't find any cigarettes," he said. A wisp of charred paper clung to Sylvia's hand. She brushed it off.

"Never mind. These will do." She took one from the table and raised her face with the cigarette in her lips as Nelson held out a match.

"Why, Sylvia, you're trembling!" he cried. "It's been too hard for you, rummaging through boxes for two days." He bent to kiss the upturned face. "Let's close the safe." His arm around her, he swung the safe door inward.

Midway the door paused in his hand.

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With an exclamation he touched the acorn knob.

"Look, dear! There's a drawer here. I never noticed it, though it's the least crack open—see?"

He pulled the knob toward him and stood dumfounded before the little heap of burned paper.

"Some one——" he began, and scooped the fragments into his palm. "But they're warm!" he said as if to himself.

Very slowly he turned his head to look at Sylvia who stood, with a snow-white face, waiting to meet his eyes. For half a minute they tried to stare each other down. At last the girl's glance wavered and she crumpled on the couch.

"Enid!" Nelson said. The one word told Sylvia things it wrung her soul to know. She was not first in this man's thoughts any more; she who had betrayed him when he tried to save that little sister of his. He pulled Sylvia's head back roughly, compelling her to meet his scornful eyes. "I don't know whether you realize what you've done." A muscle worked in his jaw and the bitter voice broke for an instant. "This letter meant more to me than life; I told you as much. Why did you do this?"

Sylvia made no answer.

"All along," Nelson continued after a moment, "I believe you've intended to destroy this letter if we found it." He waited for a reply that did not come. "You were only pretending to help me; I noticed your odd reluctance. You did this to shield Stewart."

"No!" Sylvia whispered.

"Who is it you're shielding, then?" When she remained silent he caught her by the shoulder in a grip that made the girl writhe, pulled her to her feet, and held her there.

"Please, Dick!" she gasped. "I can't tell you. I can never tell you, dear."

With an oath he thrust her from

him, headlong. She reeled against the table and clung to it, dazed not so much by the brutality of the act as by thought of the hatred that must lie behind it. Was he going to strike her, she wondered, dully? She hoped he would. Anything, anything to counteract this stabbing anguish in her heart.

But Nelson had caught at one of the charred wisps now scattered across the floor. The corner by which Sylvia had held the sheet of paper was only scorched. Nelson carried it over to the lamp. She saw him give a great start as he examined the fragment.

"I see," he said slowly.

His voice compelled her. The girl crept to the lamp, looked at the paper scrap on his finger tips, and caught it from him with a sharp scream. The bit of paper bore the signature: "S. L." Sylvia crushed it between her hands, grinding the scorched fragment into nothing.

"You needn't have done that," Nelson assured her; "I wouldn't have told."

The girl looked at him, uncomprehending.

"I could forgive—even that," he choked, and put a hand to his eyes. "I could forgive anything, Sylvia, except that you didn't tell me."

It took many slow seconds for his meaning to dawn upon her.

"Dick, I didn't—I'm not—Dick, dear, it isn't what you think. Look at me, dear. That isn't true! That isn't true!"

"What other 'S. L.' are you shielding, then?"

"It isn't true, Dick!"

"Who is 'S. L.?' Tell me. I've a right to know."

Sylvia put her hands wearily to her forehead.

"Dick, I can't tell you. I can't. But won't you believe me when I say that I've done the only possible thing when I burned that letter? Won't you trust me?"

He gave her a tired, bitter smile.

"Trust you? After this?" His hand swept the charred paper. "Good-by, Sylvia," he said, and was gone.

It seemed a dream to Sylvia—the hurried preparations that night, the departure in the early autumn morning, and the dreadful, endless ride down South in search of Stewart. Her decision, once the first stupor of agony had passed, was quickly made. She had done Nelson a great, if inevitable, injury. She would, so far as possible, undo that injury now.

Stewart, she found by industrious telephoning, was not at the country club. He was not at the Walkers', nor the Nelsons'. Well, then, the only thing to do was to see Enid Nelson and tell her about Stewart—some of the things—some of the things. Perhaps, Sylvia reflected as she waited in the dim white drawing-room for Enid Nelson, perhaps it would be best to talk, woman to woman, in any case.

At first Enid, pretty and petulant and proud, was indignant. Then she grew scornful, and at last a little frightened.

"B-but I love him so!" she said piteously. "I can't believe he would be dishonorable to a woman who was really good."

"My dear," said Sylvia, feeling very old and a bit maternal over this butterfly creature with the wistful violet eyes and the mouth so like Dick's, "I've told you in a general way what my cousin is like. Let me tell you something else." She hesitated. "It isn't easy for me —"

A soft little hand touched her on the head; two sympathetic, straining arms closed around her.

"Don't—oh, don't!" Dick's sister begged. "I can't bear to think you are suffering like this, just to help me, honey." She had an engaging accent.

Wiping her eyes, Sylvia sensed that the tears had impressed Enid more than words could have done.

"Listen, child!" Sylvia patted the other's hand. "There was a girl once who adored Stewart Lloyd. Perhaps, by the way, you know that Stewart is only my cousin by adoption? He was the adopted son of my Uncle David's half-brother. It seems complicated, but I'm telling you this to show why Stewart has not inherited much money. He would have been left a good deal, one way or another, except that he turned out so—so badly. Stewart likes to talk about how unjustly he was treated. I wanted you to know the truth.

"This girl who adored Stewart—she trusted him. He has a way with him; he's got fascination." Sylvia's tone grew hard. "She wrote him a letter, after he betrayed her." The girl, Enid, drew a quick breath. "This letter would have proved to you what kind of man he is."

"Where is the letter?" Enid asked, her face pale.

Sylvia sat a moment silent.

"I burned it," she confessed in a low tone; "don't ask me why."

The other clenched her teeth.

"I won't," she said. "I—I can see you're telling the truth." Her lips brushed Sylvia's hair. "I'm sorry, honey," she choked, and ran from the room.

A ghost of a smile curved Sylvia's lip. Would none of the Nelsons believe her innocent? Must they all leap to the same conclusion?

So lost was she in heartache that, crawling, exhausted, toward the door, she failed to notice the shadow in her path until the shadow materialized into Dick. Beside him came Stewart, gray of face but jaunty of manner.

"A happy meeting," Dick observed. "Let's have this out right here. Where's my sister?"

"Gone to her room," Sylvia answered, trying to stifle the leaping of her heart. "Don't call her, Dick. She wants to cry."

Stewart scowled.

"What've you been filling her up with?" he demanded.

"The truth, Stewart," Sylvia answered, meeting his threatening eyes steadily.

"The truth about what?" Stewart demanded.

"About that letter which Uncle David kept."

Stewart swore.

"She won't believe you. She won't believe anything against me."

Sylvia shrugged.

"Enid believes me."

Like a man acting against his will, Dick put a hand on Sylvia's arm.

"Thanks," he said. "It was good of you."

There was a bit of bluster left still in Stewart.

"I won't believe Enid's through with me till I hear it from her own lips," he declared.

"You hear it now," said Enid from

the doorway. "Stewart, I'm—through." She gave a great sob and stumbled to her brother's arms.

On the whole, her dismissed lover took it philosophically. There were "Enid, dears," and "you scandalmongers!" But Stewart knew when he was licked. He paused on the door sill after Enid, brushing past him, had fled.

"Really, Sylvia," said Stewart, "you went out of your way to interfere in my affairs. Why should you worry when Sue doesn't? She's just got herself happily married, I understand."

After he was gone, Sylvia turned a ghastly face to Nelson.

"I don't know what he meant," she said wanly. "That's just one of his bluffs—"

"I know what he meant," Nelson told her. "But I don't know how I'm ever going to win you back again."

He threw his arms wide in a gesture of utter despair, and seemed genuinely surprised when Sylvia nestled into them.

THE END.



TO ARAMINTA

I SHALL build me a song on an olden theme—
Yet a theme thrilling always new;
I shall weave on the warp of a silken dream
Just a song of the stars and you!

Just a song of the specters of stars that stray
In the marshes at silvery dawn,
Where the tamarack grows, and the iris sway
In the delicate breath of morn;

And a lyric of fanciful thoughts that play
In the depths of your limpid eyes,
Like butterflies flitting o'er meadows gay,
Or the swallows in evening skies.

But the crook-boned men of the Tremadoc flags
Crooned the song when the world was new,
On fair summer nights by the coralline crags—
Just a song of the stars and you!

AVERY BARTON.



In the Winston Manner

By Ernest L. Starr

Author of "The Worst Man in Europe,"

"The Sleepy Girl," etc.

WHAT clo's yo goin' to wear to-day, Mr. John Tom?"

It was the invariable beginning of John Tom's day, a ritual celebrated by himself and Lonzo, his colored manservant, ever since he could remember.

John Tom called from his bath:

"Is it a bright day?"

"I'll see, sir." Whereupon Lonzo threw open the glass doors leading from John Tom's living room to a small upper veranda, sniffed the air, made happy sounds in his throat, and declared: "It's bright an' shinin'!"

"Lay out something light, then, Lonzo."

"Yes, sir!"

The day would be painstakingly planned while Lonzo was shaving him. Yet so little seemed to happen on any of these days, so boringly, horribly little! What a place for a young man of John Tom's capacities and tastes! Of course he couldn't stay there.

It was an energetic, stimulating place from which to start, provided you took along these modern forty-five or fifty-year-old attributes and left behind the sleepy, prideful self-consciousness which characterized it before it came so abundantly into fulfillment.

Down in his heart John Tom meant to take both sets of attributes along with him—the pictorial pride of his father, General John Thomas Winston—pride rich as medieval tapestry and quite as heroic—and the aggressive enthusiasm of the new community. John Tom even

thought he did take them both, in spite of the general's scorn of the latter. If he did—admit for his own sake that he did—he lost one of them rather dreadfully by the wayside.

John Tom lost a great many things easily. Some he gained with a great deal of difficulty; and that's the point of his story.

"I don't care how soon you goes, sir," Lonzo would say, as he removed the last hot cloth from John Tom's glowing face, "just so as you take me, too!"

Through everything that came, the impress of that happy little home town, old in dignity, new in accomplishment, remained always with him. The sort of town where people work and sleep, because there is nothing else to do. John Tom did neither very considerably—except when he condescended to help the Haywoods on the floor of their tobacco warehouse during the selling season. The excuse he gave the general was his friendship for young Bob Haywood.

"It's very foolish of you," the general said, with a most superior sniff. "You shouldn't do it."

"Shouldn't help Bob handle the crowd? Why not, father?"

"Bob's all right. But mixing with that rabble of hucksters on the warehouse floor! That's what I mean. How can you?"

As a matter of fact John Tom rather loved the excitement and smell and dust of it, the long lines of farm wagons that swarmed methodically into the

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town—wagons piled high with golden tobacco bound in fanlike sheaves. Indoors he liked to mingle with the solemn, twang-voiced farmers while they waited, shrewdly indifferent, to see their fragrant produce stacked in graded heaps and auctioned off to buyers for the great manufactories all over the world.

John Tom had a dreamy notion that he could make a fearful lot of money out of these little farmers if he wished. Everybody he knew was in tobacco, turning it over one way or another. The greatest cigarette manufactory in the country—it was also the best advertised in the universe—was right here in the town, all over the place, dominating it, profiting its employees and its stockholders immeasurably. Everybody he knew was in the business, including any number of people who quite measured up to the general's altitudinous standards of respectability.

But John Tom was a Winston, and the only trade that the general sanctioned for a Winston was that which occurs on the stock exchange. All other Winstons had been what the general called professional men—many, it must be acknowledged, considerably less professional than others, but all laboring to maintain the mad, unvarying, high-head traditions of the family.

Madame Winston spent the last years of her life inveighing against the commonness that had come upon the town. If workers, factories and mills; if hospitals, district nurses, health centers; if movies and fairs and public debating are commonness, it had come. When Madame Winston passed on she thanked God she was leaving the place, and admonished John Tom to do the same. Her last words were an imperious command to her mourning family to close the windows.

That was because the western breeze brought into the room the pungent—and to Madame Winston excessively

distasteful—odor of the cigarette mixture which was making the town famous, wealthy, and ordinary. They had presumed—dared—to build one of their factories just behind her stately home. Instead of the perfume of her old-fashioned garden, she smelled the penetrating, abominable aroma of processed tobacco! It was racy and thrilling to almost every one else. It stood for work, achievement; the actual odor of industry. Madame Winston's last breath was eased by a slender vial of attar of roses. To the end, her quivering nostrils shrank from the tantalizing tingle of such commonness.

"John Tom," she said, dying valiantly, as befitted a Winston born a Jackson, "John Tom, can you hear me? I can't hear you—but that makes no difference. Listen to me, John Tom. This is important! Shake the dust of this place from your feet. Go away. Do you hear me?"

"Yes, mother."

Madame had inspired a good deal more awe than love in his child heart, and later she didn't seem to need his love. She always appeared as rigid as a jet-and-diamond statue.

"Make your success, John Tom—in a dignified way, of course—and marry money. Remember you're a Winston and a Jackson! Make somebody pay for it. If I catch you marrying any girl in this town—"

Her voice failed, but the fine old eyes still flashed.

"Except Fanny Haywood," she went on, forcing her waning strength to serve this final need. "Fanny's not good enough for you. The only thing she thinks of is adding another fortune to her own. But then, money's all they've got. She doesn't appreciate you. Go away, John Tom, and come back—famous!"

Her lids fluttered, then flared wide as she made her well-known end.

"Shut that window!" she gasped.

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"Oh, God, will I have to take the smell of that stuff to heaven with me?"

The general lasted a year longer, mostly sitting in the bow window of the Colonial Club, scorning the world that passed him by—factory hands, Fords, flappers and fools. He could afford to say exactly what he thought of them, for hadn't his great-great-grandfather founded the silly place? The general one day would command John Tom to be up and away; the next he would implore him to stay just a little while longer.

The year was memorable. It meant a peaceful end for the general, with John Tom watching over him far more tenderly than Madame Winston ever did. And, too, it gave John Tom plenty of time to wind up his business. That amounted to turning over the dozen odd clients he had collected during his two years of lawyering since the university. Most important of all, it brought John Tom the golden girl who would have delighted Madame Winston's vaulting soul.

"Golden!" John Tom told her lingeringly, his eyes full of dreams. "Wonderful! Golden!"

So she was. In every sense, golden.

John Tom had a way of looking at a girl—particularly a visiting girl such as this perfect person—as if in ecstasy over the mere nearness of her, forgetful, apparently, of everything but the beauty his gaze proclaimed. Yet he rarely forgot. With Fanny Haywood he did, perhaps, because Fanny had been his little love at ten, his particular desire ever since, until the coming of the golden girl.

"John Tom, do you love her?" Fanny asked.

John Tom shifted his thoughtful gaze, which had been singling out the golden girl from the crowds at the Haywood dance.

"As much as you love me," he said.

Fanny invariably got the truth from him. His posturings were not for Fanny. He liked to think that Fanny understood him better than any one else, because she was so forgiving of his easy, drifting confidence, his sensitive pride, and cerulean ambitions. Fanny herself was a flare-back to the unassuming grandparent who had founded the Haywood fortune. She was barely good-looking and amazingly sound in her thinking.

"How much is that?" she asked simply.

"You know," John Tom replied, meaning not at all.

"Yes, I know," Fanny nodded.

Who better? Yet that did not keep the mist out of her eyes as she watched John Tom winning the golden girl.

He won her, of course; for John Tom was rather magnificent in his way, the Winston-plus-Jackson way, which meant aplomb, perfect assurance, irritating or admirable according to your feeling toward such things. It meant complete acceptance from the outset, on the basis of I-know-who-I-am-do-you? Fights are won from the first moment, said the valiant Jacksons. Polish is perfection, the prideful Winstons believed.

"How long will you love me?" John Tom asked his golden girl just after their much-photographed wedding in New York.

The answer came in brittle, burnished syllables:

"Until you disappoint me, darling!"

That was a good deal for John Tom to live up to, because so much that he had to give was surface stuff; and usage plays the devil with polish. Yet, if you knew Clare, it wasn't a great deal for her to ask. Clare had felt mighty little of disappointment in her hurried life. Her somewhat flamboyant parent—the first O'Rossen to be admitted to the already tottering Horse Show Association—had seen to that. So effectively

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that when Clare wanted John Tom, Mr. O'Rossen concurred as willingly as if John Tom were a new car or a chin-chilla wrap.

She slid along the seat, adoringly close, as brides do at first, and said:

"You couldn't disappoint me, could you, John Tommie?"

John Tom held the golden head against his proud breast and vowed he never could.

"And we are going to Paris after Montreal, aren't we?" Clare pouted.

"We'll see, dear."

It had a magnanimous sound, sort of all shot with superiority. Clare, however, was one of those people in whom "we'll see" calls up regiments of wrangling little devils bent on settling the thing there and then.

"Oh, but we are!" she declared firmly.

"Very well," said John Tom in that charming Winston way; "then we are."

"Oh, oh!" said the smiling lips. "I do love you, John Tom!"

But it hurt a little.

Out of the estate which came with the general's death John Tom had already bought a perfect apartment in just the right section. Expensive, of course; but it's so much better to own than to rent. Private garage and so on, you know. How he caught on to the ways of the O'Rossen set! The apartment he gave to Clare.

For himself he bought something he had wanted all his life: the most perfect town car to be found in New York. It wasn't the best-known make in the world—that would be ostentatious; the second-best known, and equally as perfect as the apartment. Almost as pleasant as its possession was the thought that he would bring Lonzo up to drive. He would have had Lonzo long ago but for his fear that it might suggest a higher financial rating than he cared for the O'Rossens—especially Mr. O'Rossen—to impute to him. Lonzo

could both drive and valet for him now. No more agonized mornings of self-ministration!

The estate was none too large to begin with. John Tom planned to conserve everything that was left, and with it to make his long-dreamed entry into business. He wondered somewhat why Mr. O'Rossen hadn't invited him to become a partner. But then he really didn't know what Mr. O'Rossen did. Nobody seemed to know in any sort of detail. What was the difference? He could show them, both here and back home! If the money lasted—

He was in a quandary as to just how one used one's wife's money; that is—er—how a man who had married a rich girl should let her know that he could—well, that, after all, since she had so much more than he, that, perhaps, some basis could be—John Tom was the politest person imaginable, even in his own thoughts. This particular thought never quite reached a conclusion. It was so infinitely embarrassing for a Winston to—Damn it all, she should bring the thing up herself.

One day in Paris she did.

Though she already looked like the soul of Paris itself, she dragged him once more from Reboux to Premet, from Perugia to Callot, for additional purchases. It was late afternoon. He longed for the cocktail bar at the Ritz. Yesterday it was the same thing. He had paid for a roomful of satin, lace, and velvet with that splendid open manner of his. Madame Winston would have loved it. Then, while Clare was reveling in the clothes, he had slipped into the drawing-room to consult a little notebook which showed the immediate status of his finances. He became quite determined that the thing shouldn't happen again. Yet here he was; and the stuff was probably already arriving at their hotel.

"Do you need all this, dear?" he began.

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"Yes, and a lot more before we sail."

"Really? More?"

"Why not, John Tom?"

"There'll be so much expense in connection with our settling down when we get back home," John Tom said persuasively—pleasantly so, "that I thought we might be glad if we'd gone a little bit easier over here. Don't you see?"

"No."

"But, my dear Clare——"

"Are we running short?" Clare inquired crisply.

"I am." He put a nice distinctive emphasis on the pronoun.

Clare looked away. Then she said reprovingly: "I thought of course you had established your credit over here."

Never having been out of his own country before, John Tom had a provincial sort of faith in travelers' checks and that sort of thing. Besides, establishing credit meant spending money, which was precisely what he did not——

"I brought no money at all," Clare said.

"But of course you've established your credit here, dear?" John Tom suggested.

It sounded rather dreadful. John Tom bolstered himself with the thought that it simply had to be said. Money! Talking about it, wrangling about it—her money and his! He hated himself. He hated Clare.

The golden girl, preciously poised, took her time when she had something especially worth while to say.

"Pay for what I've bought," she told him slowly, levelly, "and I'll have father make you an allowance when we get home!"

John Tom spent not only the balance of the afternoon but the entire evening in the cocktail bar of the Ritz. Clare went to the Opera Comique with a man named Lawrence who, John Tom vaguely understood, had wanted to marry her. John Tom drank to their

complete demolition at the hands of some speed-mad Paris cabman.

He pretended to be asleep when Clare got in.

"Wake up, darling," she said sweetly.

"I feel like talking."

"To-morrow," John Tom objected.

"Oh, but now, darling!"

"Well?"

A moment's smiling pause.

"I'm sorry I said it, John Tom."

"You should be."

"Forgive me?"

"No!"

"What else can I say?"

"We'll see!"

"Rot!"

"Then—you'll see, Clare!"

"When?"

"When we get home."

"Don't be absurd, John Tom. Father means to do something decent, of course."

"I don't want your damned money!"

"Haven't you enough for us?" Clare probed. "They told me so down where you and the best-selling cigarettes come from."

"Who told you?"

"Your friends, the Haywoods. They'd know, naturally."

"They?" said John Tom. He couldn't imagine Bob Haywood listening to such a question, or answering it.

"Well," Clare conceded, "not they, then. Fanny told me. Oh, yes, I asked her, darling. I had to report to father, you see. Fanny gave you a clean bill of—shall we say finance? Clean and almost enthusiastic. The point is—have you?"

"I've enough to start on, if that's what you mean. You can be sure of that!"

John Tom wanted to cry a little, all to himself, but the lights were on.

Perhaps Madame Winston was right. A Jackson-Winston had every reason to expect something in return. But madame had never met the O'Rossens.

When they got home Mr. O'Rossen offered nothing more substantial than champagne for breakfast and a series of invitations which John Tom discreetly refused.

"Just a quiet little affair, my boy; only five of us—five men, I mean. Meet me here after the theater, about twelve."

That sort of thing, with a libidinous smile creasing his fat face. Who ever heard of going on a wild party with one's father-in-law! It seemed too fearfully something. He couldn't—simply couldn't.

So John Tom began, on his own, to frequent the great financial district where he would in time belong—unquestionably belong. He knew a few people down there: John Locke, who paid a small fortune to become a junior partner with Lasely and Lanson; and Edwin Quarles, doing amazingly with a group which specialized in oils. Through them—that is, in quite the correct way to meet prominent people—he came to know a number of men who, if you believe them, were the backbone of the country's business. Without them the country would indubitably go to smash. They liked John Tom. Every one did. He could listen with such splendid earnestness, no matter what he was thinking about; nod sagely, and ask just the courteous question that led the speaker on to further heights. It was a Winston trick, or perhaps a Jackson.

Offers came to him, too; propositions, he called them. They weren't exactly junior partnerships—he would have to look into that and see how the thing was arranged—but at least they meant a practical working arrangement with any one of a half-dozen responsible concerns. Decidedly there was a place on the Street for a young man of such sterling qualities, such sound understanding of the fundamentals of big business. John Tom was charmingly appreciative, but he thought it best

not to act too quickly. He preferred to study the situation somewhat more carefully before committing himself. His belief that these various concerns were severally disappointed gave John Tom a feeling of very natural pride. He must be sure not to keep them waiting too long. That was only decent and considerate.

Home, Clare, the car, the O'Rossen set filled his days and evenings. Clare was adorable and expensive. The marital irresponsibilities of the O'Rossen crowd were a bit bewildering; a game of tag: you chase my wife and I'll chase yours. Unusual, but not really dangerous. This man Lawrence, for instance. He had been in love with Clare, wanted to marry her. That was a thing of the past, of course. Then why worry when Clare said: "I am riding with Ted Lawrence this morning;" or: "Ted's taking me to the Trocadero to-night?" The idea! Absurd! He nursed a genteel hate for Lawrence, nevertheless. Lawrence was too expansive, too showy. He owned not one but three of the best-known cars in the world, done respectively in red, yellow and bright purple. Too bad. Why couldn't people realize—

John Tom felt obliged to object to Clare's driving the purple one—a small-bodied, vicious thing—all over town day after day. Conspicuous. Fanny Haywood wouldn't dream of doing such a thing. Clare agreed with surprising humility—and had it painted black, accepting it at the same time as a birthday token from Lawrence.

Queer ways, but then—

One has to learn, to grow. It was pleasant to sign checks, to have Theodore smile his discreet, inclusive welcome when you entered the Madison, to find the best of everything reserved for you, to have your own friends try to steal your valet from you, to hear the women say, "That marvelous Winston man, General Winston's son, you

know"—as if they'd ever heard of the general!

Clare was quite perfect, too. Keyed to top pitch, febrile often, but clear-eyed always when she came into his arms.

"Don't you ever get tired?"

"Never, John Tom, until I'm broke!" she told him.

"I mean of people."

"I adore them as long as they're amusing. By the way, we're swimming this afternoon. I've hired the pool at the Reardon Terrace. I forgot to tell you. The whole crowd'll be there. You're coming, of course?"

John Tom felt a wee little chill around his heart. Clare invariably forgot her promise to pipe down on the extravagance thing. Practically all the money they spent passed through her hands. Every day something new. He would have to hurry his decision in regard to business.

"Sorry. I have an engagement."

"That's not nice, John Tom. Where are you going? What are you doing?"

"Does it matter?"

Then Clare made up for it in her own gorgeous way, smothering him with kisses, drawing him down beside her, being the golden girl all over again. That was the hour he lived for. Clare could make him forgive even the niggardliness of O'Rossen when she wove that flaming spell.

"Do you know why I married you, John Tom?"

"I've often wondered."

Clare replied in her best manner, like a blanket of roses spread over a floor of hot iron.

"Because we O'Rossens aren't so much after all, you know."

John Tom weathered the storm admirably.

"No?"

"Not so much. Father loves to pile it on, but I'd a lot rather be a nice Winston along with you, and a John-

son and everything—your mother was a Johnson, wasn't she?"

"Jackson!" said John Tom, hurt.

Instead of swimming, John Tom did the thing he liked better than anything to do. He called Lonzo and ordered out the car.

"Yes, sir!"

John Tom could almost think himself back home again when he heard that devoted voice.

"Anywhere special, Mr. John Tom?"

"No; just go. Same as usual."

It was what he often did, particularly when he became entirely fed up with the crowd which constantly filled the house. He loved the luxury of the car, the lolling relaxation. He liked to think of it as something brilliantly earned, the reward of a notable career. He liked to have Lonzo lower the glass behind the driver's seat, so that he could converse quite grandly with his faithful servitor. Lonzo adored the situation with equal fervor. They stood for home and folks to each other—real folks, you understand. Lonzo knew short cuts to the green roads that looked like home country. Once out, the conversation quickened.

Not so to-day. John Tom was deeply and mysteriously silent. Lonzo cast uneasy glances backward. Mr. John Tom sure was distracted.

"Lonzo," he said eventually, "we've come to the end."

"Whazzat, sir?"

"The end. We've come to the end."

"No, sir, Mr. John Tom! There's miles more ahead like this here road!"

"The end of playing, Lonzo. I've got work to do!"

It sounded brave and confident.

"Sure you has, Mr. John Tom! What's it goin' to be? Can I help you any?"

Why go in with any one else, John Tom reasoned Winstonly, at moderate pay, when he could do the same thing alone? These older houses were all

very well in their way, but why not start something quite by himself? He knew the ropes. All that was necessary was to pick the right thing, quietly to wait for your market, then to push it for all you were worth. Simple. It had been done by cable even all the way from Manila. Easy. Thrilling. Wonderful.

Day and night he studied market reports, statistical data, financial statements. He haunted the offices of John Locke and Edwin Quarles. He investigated priceless information out of the half-dozen houses where he might have been securely affiliated. From every one he knew, from every source he trusted, he extracted the information—confirmation—he sought. Thus he applied the second set of attributes which he was so sure he had brought along.

It was like the preparation of a case at court. John Tom got all the kick that his first trial had given him down home. Now as then he glowed with the consciousness that he had left absolutely nothing unattended to. His brief was complete. He staked his reputation as a lawyer on that case. To-day he staked everything left of his inheritance.

On the strength of the evidence he had collected he made his own decision; rather like being judge and prosecutor, too. For what he had undertaken to do there was no one but himself to trust. That was the Winston way—or was it the Jackson?—that thing about the fight being won from the start? There's a question whether any Jackson or any Winston since Edward the Confessor—or whoever these gorgeous clans trace back to—ever entered a combat more blithely confident or came out so utterly routed.

John Tom picked the deadliest dud ever left on the financial battlefield. He was literally blotted out.

He couldn't understand. He was dazed. He sat in the little room from which he had been operating, his whirl-

ing, hot, sickish head flat upon the glass top of his desk.

Blotted out. Just that. Finished before he'd begun. Blotted.

The ringing—that endless, fearful buzzing—wasn't in his head; not all of it. He took up the receiver to stop the noise.

"Yes. Yes. Yes! Hell, yes!"

He couldn't keep disaster to himself as he had his "plan of campaign." A dozen men told him they would have saved him if he had let them know even a little bit of what he— They all liked him. Every one did.

"Thanks. Yes. No. Hell!"

Clare, down home, the O'Rossen set—what would they think?

The bell rang on and on.

Blotted out! His brain bumped and jolted like a train on cross ties, and wouldn't come to a stop. That ringing!

"Well? What is it? Yes? Well?"

Ted Lawrence on the wire, his voice booming and zipping like a patent loud speaker. Ted was simply broken-hearted to know the news. Wasn't there something—anything, he could do?

Perhaps there is a balancing sort of worth in general hatred. John Tom came somewhat to himself as he heard that offensive voice, visualized its expansive owner.

"Splendid of you, Ted," he said, almost in the old way. "All in the game, you know. I've a lot of fight left! I'll be even again in a couple of weeks. See you soon!"

He was white and tired when he reached the apartment. He had walked all the way home—he didn't know how many miles—trying to get the crazy thing on top of his neck to working right.

Ted Lawrence was there. Ted left almost at once. In a moment Mr. O'Rossen came, but first Clare said:

"Well, you've done it now, haven't you?"

She was white, too, with narrowed eyes that seemed to shine absurdly. Empty glasses were on the little table beside her chair.

"Lawrence told you?" John Tom said dully.

"Why not?"

John Tom felt his reasoning so profusely that he couldn't quite get it into words.

"You mean," he blundered, "that Ted came straight to you to tell you the news about what—what's happened, before I had a chance to tell you myself?"

"What of it?" Clare said coolly. "Suppose you try yourself now?"

A great peace came over John Tom. He knew—at last he knew what he was going to do.

"Oh, ho!" Mr. O'Rossen mocked at his shoulder.

John Tom merely looked at them, courteously, aloofly, in the pleasant head-up way he had. He rang for Lonzo.

"I'm going home."

They stared.

"Don't look like that," he laughed, though it sounded little like his own voice. "This isn't the end. Just the beginning! I'm merely going home—to turn over some property. Then I'm coming back. Do you two get that clearly? Coming back!"

So John Tom went home. But not famous. Perhaps somewhere off in the nice blue ether, where she couldn't smell tobacco, Madame Winston knew; and knowing, she shook her stately head in pity.

It wasn't his own property John Tom meant to turn over. He had none. Bank property. A loan. He needed the money. Henry Payson Dowst wrote a pretty fine story once under that title, "He Needed the Money." All about a man who was the pleasantest person in the world, spending as he earned;

and unexpectedly he ran into the opportunity to make an extra-good business investment. He had no money, no property. He tried to borrow. No one would lend because no one had the slightest respect for his ability to handle money. He needed the money—and didn't get it. John Tom had never read Dowst's story. Too bad! It might have saved him a lot of humiliation.

John Tom went to his best friends first. He hated for any one else to know. If one of his best friends came through, everything would be excellent. He could hurry back to the Street, consult his able advisers—the dozen odd who would so gladly have saved him if they had known—dramatize his actual comeback, and be safe again in no time. So he went to his dear old friends. They had it. Being in tobacco they couldn't help having it.

What is there about tobacco that hardens the heart and arteries and everything? John Tom wondered. He couldn't understand. His best friends!

"I can let you have a thousand or so," Bob Haywood said. "But what you ask—I just can't, John Tom."

"Sorry," said John Tom lightly. "I shouldn't have spoken of it."

"If I could," Bob Haywood amplified kindly. "You know that, John Tom. But I simply can't pull that much out of my business or investments. You see, don't you?"

A thousand or so would be about as useful to John Tom as a suit of Highland kilts. He wanted fifty times as much.

"Will a thousand help any?" Haywood went on. "Of course it isn't much, but—"

John Tom laughed in spite of his flushed face.

"Don't be funny, Bob," he said. "It isn't little money I want. I'm splendidly fixed for that. It's big stuff I'm going after when I get back to the Street."

He had been only as definite as need be with his dear friends. No one knew that there was nothing at all left of his father's estate. He couldn't tell them that. And there were no dear friends left now! Haywood, the best of them, he had saved for last.

"Are you sure you don't want it? You're welcome, you know."

"Oh, no, Bob. That isn't the idea at all! Thanks, though, much."

An hour's talk with the president of the Wendell Bank and Trust Company sent him out with flaming cheeks and a horrible hurt in his heart. The president person had gone too far. He was one of the most delightful people imaginable, and one of the very shrewdest. Having known John Tom all his life, and the general most of his, the president could speak authoritatively. He did that very thing, while John Tom flushed and winced.

John Tom sat in his room at the hotel, hands hanging tightly at his sides, staring at nothing. They called the hotel the Robert E. Lee. They would. From the window John Tom could see—in fact, he had just been gazing at it—the fine old Winston homestead, and his own corner rooms, with the little shaded upper veranda. It was owned now by one of the department heads of the great tobacco company. Ten years earlier this man was wearing overalls. A servant brought John Tom a note. Fanny Haywood was waiting at the curb for him.

They were too busy speaking to people right and left to do much talking until they crossed the Southbound Bridge and got out under the trees. John Tom, being a prescient soul, knew that Fanny had heard. Fanny and Bob were nearer to each other than most sisters and brothers, and both were his very dear friends. Nevertheless she said:

"Seen Bob to-day?"

"Yes."

Then a good stretch of silence.

"I'm sorry, John Tom," Fanny said unaffectedly and frankly.

"What for?" John Tom asked lightly.

"That things—— Oh, well, why talk about it?"

"Let's not, Fanny."

"I just want to say——"

Fanny was slowing the car. She turned to John Tom. He was lifted quite out of himself by something he saw in her face—a glow and mistiness that made her almost lovely.

"Why, Fanny!" he whispered.

"I just wanted to say," she went on, "that, if you will let me into the investment you are making, I'll be glad to have you handle my interest in it, yourself."

The whole of it came out with a rush, the words tripping over each other.

"Let me know," she finished hurriedly, "what my share is to be and I'll send you my check—to the hotel—to-day!"

The car stopped. At first John Tom said nothing at all. Something he hadn't felt for months was sloshing through his heart, shaking him rather dreadfully out of the even sort of indifference he meant to feel every moment he was with Fanny. Jumbled flashes of things darted through his brain—Fanny and himself, the home town and golden tobacco in fanlike sheaves, the pleasant old family place that was gone, and—and—peace. He took Fanny's hand. Rather awkwardly he held it to his lips, all the old grace and smoothness gone, forgotten.

"Fanny, dear," he said, with an odd choking in his throat, "the investment isn't good enough for you."

That night he left for New York, wiring Clare of his return. He had received no word whatever from her during his ten days away.

He meant to have an open, friendly talk with Mr. O'Rossen. A person of

his sort could be made to realize, surely, that, after all, he owed John Tom something—owed him a great deal in fact. John Tom assured himself that he knew just how to handle such people as O'Rossen—a cool superiority which is far more effective than anything approaching violence. The O'Rossen attitude simply had to be cleared up; and John Tom could do it. Beyond a doubt.

Both domiciles he found unoccupied—his own and O'Rossen's quarters at the Unity Club. The club steward said merely that Mr. O'Rossen had left for Europe; but the house manager at his own place was more explicit. Mrs. Winston and her father, Mr. O'Rossen, had gone to France with Mr. Lawrence. Furthermore he explained:

"Mr. O'Rossen's business bogged down quite awfully, you know, Mr. Winston."

"Bogged down?" John Tom could never get used to this second-class New York sophistication.

"Oh, yes! Didn't you see the story the papers had?"

"No."

"Mr. O'Rossen, it said, lost heart when his last shipload was confiscated because it was caught inside the twelve-mile limit. He has retired for good and all, I hear."

John Tom heard himself saying:

"Retired, has he?"

"Oh, yes. I understand Mr. Lawrence's yacht is being convoyed to the Mediterranean, to await further orders at Marseilles."

The information, John Tom said off-hand, was old news to him. He thought all the time it would end that way! He gave the house manager one of his rapidly vanishing ten dollar bills and gayly hailed a cab. With a foot on the step he turned to say:

"By the way, I expected my man Lonzo—you remember him—to meet me here. Have you seen him?"

Lonzo had been seen, yes. In fact, he came around practically every afternoon at six o'clock or so, asking whether there was a letter from Mr. John Tom Winston. Lonzo, it appeared, was now driving a cab.

John Tom couldn't argue the points with his generous informant. He couldn't comfort himself with the thought that his impeccable manner had deceived that garrulous person, not even in the matter of the confiscated shipload. All the shades of all the Winstons and Jacksons seemed to shiver with him at that terrible disclosure! John Tom could only go apart and consider things—consider them in their various aspects and interlocking imputations.

First he went to a funny little place on Forty-fifth Street, where the manager leaves the café by a secret stair and brings each drink down—by hand, mind you—from his living quarters above. Next John Tom went to a fourth floor walk-up cubicle on Fiftieth. There the proprietor conducts a hair-net business. Yet each show case contains material far more serviceable and stimulating to men—and only men are seen there—than hair goods. Then he went to Eighth Avenue, bravely indifferent to the conventions, discreet nevertheless. Each locality was selected, you see, with the well-known Jackson-Winston aversion to the ostentatious.

In a hazy sort of way John Tom meant to dream all the dreams he could, and wake up as near the back-home dead levelness as possible. It took him seven days and seven nights to reach that end.

But such dreams!

Fanny and Clare, in his dreams, were confused in the most amazing friendliness, drawn together by their avid desire for himself. O'Rossen was a sort of keeper of a harem; Lonzo a glistening Nubian with a bunch of keys at his wrist. Himself—he varied from

Haroun to Dreiser, but always he was tremendously desired. That was the point; to be wanted by people who loved you.

Sometimes, however, between dreams there came a smashing wave of self-realization, still clouded, but based somewhat on actuality. Such a journey as he made, for example, afoot to the building where the perfect apartment was hidden, the place he had given Clare. Six o'clock. She would be coming home soon. He would wait. Here against the door, where the house manager couldn't see him. Comfortable.

"Why, Mr. John Tom, where you been?"

Lonzo speaking; Lonzo jumping out of a car that looked amazingly like his own second best known in the world. But the thing was painted yellow, with funny, streamline waves of color woven around its body.

"Don't you know me, Mr. John Tom? I'se Lonzo! Lonzo, Mr. John Tom!"

John Tom lurched over to the curb, sobbing a little.

"Anywhere special, Mr. John Tom?"

"No, just go. Same as ush—ushual."

For a long time Lonzo sat there on the back seat, with John Tom in his arms.

At the hospital they couldn't quite find the trouble. But doctors mustn't fail to make a case, so they traced the trouble to John Tom's heart. Lonzo could have told them that. They watched and waited, but somehow John Tom wouldn't respond. No vitality, they said. Just gone; all of him just gone.

Lonzo slept on the floor beside John Tom's bed, a thing you'd say couldn't happen anywhere outside of books—or North Carolina.

One morning, when the doctor was leaning over him, thumping and stethoscoping, John Tom opened his eyes wide and asked:

"How much does it cost to die, doctor?"

Sentimental, of course; but so beautifully in character.

The doctor offered his best sick-room manner.

"Ha, ha, hah! You've come to, have you, young man?"

"I've been 'to' for a long time, doctor; but I hated to look at you. What does it cost, really? No joking. You ought to know."

"Now, we aren't going to talk about anything so serious!"

"No?" John Tom said humbly.

"Certainly not."

"I mean, doctor, what do I owe you and the hospital, and all that? And what for the cheerful business after I am gone? Be a good fellow; tell me! And I must have flowers. Lilies. Count them in, too."

Lonzo drew nearer, his face gray with fear.

"Don't talk that way, Mr. John Tom, sir!"

"But I mean it!"

The doctor, laughing in his unctuous way, named a round, round sum.

"Lonzo," said John Tom tentatively, "how much have we?"

It lacked enough by half.

"My God, I can't afford even to die!" John Tom exclaimed.

"Don't talk like that, Mr. John Tom," Lonzo begged, "please!"

"Can't afford to—Lonzo, what do you think of that, you funny nigger! And what are we going to do now?" He put the question to him.

"Let's go home, Mr. John Tom!" Lonzo whispered.

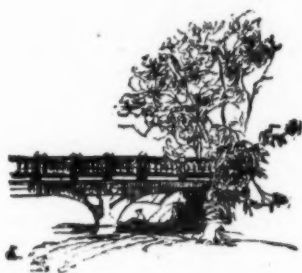
There are some people down there in the tobacco town who say that John Tom's story proves nothing at all. I wonder. If either set of attributes helps any one, what a benefit to the people who possess them both! Otherwise—profoundly speaking—where are

you? With all their dependence on the new-found set, they are finely conscious down there of the former, the inborn. They rather glory in it. And would they glory in it unless they realized that with one as a basis, the other gives a pretty brave sort of completeness to their days and their dreams?

John Tom, at any rate, has a tobacco warehouse of his own. Fanny gave it to him as a wedding present. He keeps three sets of personal accounts: one for what he owes Fanny; one for what he

owes himself; one for what he owes the new-old little town which he adores.

He loves to watch the long lines of farm wagons that swarm methodically into the town—wagons piled high with golden tobacco bound in fanlike sheaves. He rather enjoys mingling with the solemn, twang-voiced farmers while they wait, shrewdly indifferent, to see their fragrant produce piled in graded heaps and auctioned off to buyers for the big manufactories all over the world.



SAD LITTLE SONG TO LEHUA

LEHUA, when you lay with me
Deep in flowers by the sea.

When we sang each other songs
Of your wounded country's wrongs,

When we told each other tales
Looking at the sampan sails,

When your hands like dusky birds
Darted to your gusts of words,

Then, oh, then we could not see
What the world would do to me;

Then oh, then we never knew
What the world would do to you.

GENEVIEVE TAGGARD.



That Persistent Primitive

By Phyllis Duganne



IT had been a case of the attraction of opposites from the very beginning.

It wasn't merely the usual situation in which Irene Fenton's friends wondered what on earth she could see in Charley, while the friends of Charles Jean Marie Byrne marveled equally at what enchantment Irene could have cast over him. Any little boy or girl from the primer class could have seen at a glance that Irene was lovely and charming and desirable, and Charley's attraction was all but legend. It was easy enough to understand what they saw in one another, but, granting them each an average amount of intelligence, it was inexplicable that they should try to merge it.

Oil and water, flame and ice. Not that Irene was cold; she was cool, rather, with the crystal freshness of a swift stream; poised, somehow inviolate. And Charley—"He's a changeling, of course," she explained him later, when more intimate knowledge made some sort of explanation necessary.

Their families were cut from much the same pattern; they lived, in fact, on the same street in Philadelphia, in houses almost as similar within as they were without, except that the Byrne household showed traces of Charley's voyagings. The second Mrs. Byrne could

not approve of her stepson, but she welcomed the strange gifts which came from him, carried by still stranger stamps, with as great an eagerness as she had banished those things in her husband's household which had been introduced there by Charley's French mother.

Irene had never met Charles Jean Marie Byrne, yet it was natural enough that, since her coming-out party coincided with one of his brief returns to Philadelphia, he should be listed among the guests. She had not given him a thought in the days that preceded the ball. True, he was a romantic figure, a source of conjecture and excitement in her group, but what romance could overshadow the romance of one's debut? Not a thought did Irene give to Charley, so, when she slipped away from the ballroom to catch her breath in the dimness of the library for an instant, she faced the man who spoke to her as one faces a stranger, inquiringly, politely.

"Do you happen to know that you're beautiful?" he asked her, after a silence.

Polite inquiry slipped from Irene's face; she looked at the man before her, recognized him, caught her breath, and blushed.

Charles Jean Marie Byrne shook his head slowly.

"You shouldn't do that," he said. "You should be white—white all over."

Irene was silent while the blush deepened, traveled in a smooth wave down the line of her throat, across her neck, to the imperturbable ivory white of her gown.

Charley's eyes followed the tide of that blush, lifted again to her face. Without moving his dark head, he seemed to be nodding, acquiescing to some inner thought.

"It's a pity that you're so respectable," he said, with an utter simplicity.

Irene, still wordless, seemed to sense genuine regret, almost a compassion, in his tone. Her blue eyes, searching his, held a sort of alarm—at eighteen, the poise, which so characterized the Irene of twenty, was still in the making. She stared at him, quite unconscious that she was indelibly cutting the outlines of that strange face deep in her memory. Then, without having spoken a word, she turned sharply and went back to the ballroom. She did not see Charles Jean Marie Byrne again for three years.

"I've met Mr. Byrne"—Irene answered the inquiry of her hostess, smiling—"but I think I have never spoken a word to him." Her smile withdrew from her hostess, offered itself, in all its charm, to the man who stood between them.

"And I've met Miss Fenton—and spoken about a dozen words to her," said Charley.

The hostess drifted away, with a faintly perplexed smile, to greet a new group of guests which filled the doorway, and Irene and Charley stood looking at one another.

"You're still beautiful," Charley said.

Against the lustrous black of her smart frock, Irene's flesh gleamed like white marble; her cool black eyes returned his gaze steadily, from beneath the brim of her black-satin hat.

"Still beautiful!" she repeated mock-

ingly. "May I engage you to return, every three years, to tell me that?"

His smile ignored her; it was as though he was thinking of something else.

"And still respectable," he added.

Irene had expected that.

"You went away!" she returned. It was what she had intended to say, yet, once said, the three words returned to echo in her head, as though it had become emptied of every other thought. He went away—he went away—

He *had* gone away! As they stood there, with the noise of the tea mounting about them, they stood alone with that thought. Irene's breath caught in her throat and formed a barrier against that poise for which she was noted; it seemed to her that she knew every shade that was passing in the mind of Charles Jean Marie Byrne. All the three years in which he had been gone were held up to a searching, glaring light, like eggs before a candle flame, and found empty. Charley had known that they would be empty, known it on that evening of her début. And she had not known it until this moment. Balls, weddings—in three years Irene had been maid of honor seven times—Junior League activities—what else? Other men went away, but this man alone took something with him, could give her something by remaining. "I came back," said Charles Jean Marie Byrne.

Irene made an attempt to collect herself. People must be staring at them, standing there so silently absurd. It was her turn to speak, and the only answer she could find lay in a single word. She should turn and walk away, as she had turned three years before. And then wait three years again? For him to return and say, so regretfully, as though the waste of it hurt him, that she was still beautiful?

His eyes were upon her. He knew; merely he was waiting to see which she would do. She started to turn toward

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her hostess, but her muscles had become lead. One word—and perhaps both their lives would be transformed!

"Stay," said Irene Fenton, and, as though it had been a password, the sound of her voice released the lock of her muscles; she turned away, smiled, and joined a group of people across the room.

Irene's friends felt that they understood what she saw in Charley. He was not handsome, but he was distinguished; they made an attractive pair. Technically, he was a good match; family and fortune were all that could be desired. Irene had always been suspected of liking queer people, and certainly Charley was odd. But they could not comprehend those things which Irene Fenton appeared to overlook.

Charley was always amusing, and quite often he was amusing without being vulgar. Other times— There was no restraint in Charley's being; what is known among the refined as Anglo-Saxon was as much a living language to him as either English or French, and whenever a solid, well-rounded word, which doubtless was quite permissible in the days of Queen Elizabeth, served his purpose better than its equivalent in either of the other two languages he spoke so easily, Charley did not hesitate to use it. This habit was more than a novelty in the set in which the Fentons and elder Byrnes moved; it was breath taking.

Irene's promise to marry him affected them in different, yet basically similar, ways. Charley's method was the simpler; he avoided the torrent of doubts and alarms which assailed his fiancée the instant he left her, by setting out in an orderly and thorough manner to become drunk. As always, under those circumstances, he succeeded magnificently. For Irene, there was nothing to do but sit alone in her room and wonder at what she had done. If she had just

promised to marry the Sultan of Turkey, her future life with him could seem no more involved or strange than seemed life with Charley.

Charley had wanted to be married immediately.

"We'll chuck everything here and go on over to Paris and enjoy ourselves," he said.

It was difficult to convince him that she could not do that.

"But I don't want to be engaged!" he protested. "My Heaven, Irene! Marriage is enough like a cold bath, anyway, but this business of sitting on the edge of the tub, shivering and thinking it over—ugh!"

Irene smiled.

"Don't you suppose that's the purpose of engagements, anyway, Charley? A period so thoroughly unpleasant that one has a chance and more than open mind for backing out?"

He did not return her smile.

"You're so reasonable, Irene. Don't you ever get fed up with being reasonable?"

"Might as well have one reasonable person in the family."

"I don't know," said Charley gloomily.

"I wish you weren't so beautiful, Irene."

It was like being engaged to a chameleon, Irene thought. Sometimes they spent long, perfect days together, planning their future, exulting in one another. And other times—

Charley flatly refused to attend the dinner which Irene's aunt was giving to announce their engagement.

"I won't do it, Irene! It's horrible! Standing up there, Exhibits A and B, for every one to stare at and speculate about! Wonder how they'll get on—how many children they'll have—I tell you I won't!"

He had to go, of course, but he went so sulkily, so ungraciously, that Irene's congratulations verged on condolences. The curious thing was that she didn't mind so very much. She knew what

Charley was; if other people couldn't see, it was their loss. And she continued smoothly with plans for a dinner party at her own home.

Charley followed her through the social intricacies of a Philadelphia engagement with increasing sullenness and discontent.

"I think you're a delusion and a snare, Irene," he accused her, the day before he went away. "You're beautiful, like some lovely thing pagans might fashion and set up on a pedestal with garlands of flowers, to worship. And all the time they're worshipping you, inside you're shriveled up like a bad nut; just a bunch of rules and conventions and prejudices. It isn't fair to look like one thing and be another. Respectability! It's your whole creed. I hate it!"

"Don't you want to marry me?" Irene asked quietly.

He jumped up and paced the room angrily.

"Of course I don't want to marry you!" he retorted. "I don't want to marry any one—especially you! We'll be miserable! But I can't help it. I want you! I—oh, damn!"

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her and Irene closed her eyes upon everything else in the world.

The next day was sure to bring something, afterwards, Irene was grateful that it had been merely a cablegram. Charley's maternal uncle had died and Charley's presence was necessary in settling the estate.

"Paris!" said Charley, almost ecstatically. "It is like going to heaven! I was beginning to think I'd never see the place again!"

Irene looked at him curiously. They were going to Paris for their honeymoon, but she did not remind him of that, now.

"How long will it take?" she asked him.

"Not long—couple of weeks, I guess. Oh, Irene!"

She hated the kiss that he gave her, hated its vehemence. It was a kiss of joy that he was going away from her, that he was returning to Paris.

"You'll write to me?" she asked him dully.

"Of course. But I won't be gone long."

He did not urge her to marry him and come with him. It was natural enough, perhaps; too many times she had refused to bring the day of their wedding nearer. But her spirits sank as his soared, and her dejection, when he had gone, seemed to her mother far greater than a month's separation merited.

He posted three letters the day he arrived at Cherbourg—letters whose gayety and humor Irene resented, because it was all inspired by Paris, and not by herself. Another letter, about the estate, followed within a week. Then silence—utter, complete silence—while she waited and suffered. Charley's fourth letter might have been written to any one from anywhere. He was having a good time; the weather was fine; he had run into old friends. No word of his return, of the estate, of his love. No word of anything that she, or any one else, would have been interested to hear. Irene read it through twice, tore it into small pieces, and retreated into an impregnable shell of silence.

He had been gone a month and a half when Mrs. Fenton's patience, upon which she had been congratulating herself, broke its bonds.

"When is Charley coming back, Irene?" she demanded.

Irene shrugged.

Her mother was silent for a moment.

"Have you quarreled with Charley, Irene?"

"No."

"People's questions are getting embarrassing, Irene."

"Are they?"

Her daughter's indifference aroused Mrs. Fenton to irritation.

"I think you'd better write and ask Charley to return," she said sharply. "Of course, every one realizes that it's his farewell to Paris as a bachelor, but just the same——"

"I have written him," Irene interrupted. "A week ago." She rose quietly and walked out of the room, threw herself on her bed.

Charley would never return, now. Why should he? If he had found freedom from the enchantment which had held him so unwillingly in Philadelphia, why should he, of his own free will, return to it? And what was she going to do? She wanted him, needed him. And there was nothing, nothing she could do!

Her mother interrupted her to tell her that it was time for her to go downtown for a fitting. The day of her wedding to Charles Jean Marie Byrne was less than a month away.

"Of course I realize how absurd it is, Irene dear," Madeline Warner said affectionately, "but I think that, if Charley's business in France is about over, you should have him come home. People *will* talk."

"Won't they, though?" In spite of the heaviness which had descended upon her spirit at the news which Madeline had rushed from the boat to give her, her mouth jerked into a smile. People would talk, indeed, and the least among them was not her mother's friend, Madeline Warner.

Mrs. Warner looked at Irene suspiciously. The girl was growing more like Charley Byrne every day. Down-right rude, she called it! Her eyes flashed irritation.

"It is too absurd," she repeated, eyeing Irene sharply. "A snake charmer! I went up to see her, my dear—I knew you'd want to know all about it. A most unpleasant sort of woman, prac-

tically nude, and so brown and greasy looking! Part Hindu, I believe. As though any man who was engaged to you—— Oh, the things people will believe!"

"And spread," murmured Irene softly. Again Madeline Warner's eyes flashed across the girl's face.

"How long has Charley been away?" she inquired.

A stiffness seemed to shoot through Irene's body; she sat erect, and her smile was like Charley's in its calm contempt.

"Charley has been away nearly two months," she said, pleasantly. "I haven't had a letter from him for two weeks. I think your idea that he is attracted by this woman is quite possibly true. It hurts me exceedingly. I have no intention of breaking my engagement to him. Is there anything else you want to know?"

Mrs. Warner and Mrs. Fenton had each risen.

"Really, Irene——" Mrs. Warner was saying, in a voice of ice.

"Irene—my dear——" her mother stammered.

Irene looked up with a serenity that gave no sign of her inward quivering of nerves. She smiled again—a smile of dismissal—at their guest.

"So nice of you to have come to me—first," she said, and picked up a magazine from the table, opened it, and let her eyes travel slowly down the page.

Mrs. Fenton accompanied the visitor to the door, and watched, through the window, her bristling retreat down the sidewalk. Irene continued, for a moment, to read.

"Sorry, mother," she said finally.

Mrs. Fenton sat down abruptly, concern on her countenance.

"But—what are you going to do, Irene? Do you really believe Madeline Warner?"

"I don't know. Every one else will,

anyway. She—she made me sick, mother!"

Mrs. Fenton was feeling much the same unease which she always felt in the presence of her prospective son-in-law. Irene had changed!

"You'll—if he doesn't come back, Irene—you'll have to break the engagement!"

Irene's silence goaded her mother, as it had goaded their guest.

"You've got to have some self-respect, Irene. You can't go and drag him back and make him marry you! I—I never did approve of Charley Byrne. This will be just the beginning of affairs like this. If you do marry him——"

"You think I'd have to go after him and drag him back quite often?" Irene supplied, in her mother's hesitation.

Mrs. Fenton nodded.

"Yes, I do. If you break your engagement now, every one will laugh at Madeline. And she'll have to think you were being sarcastic. You—you were really, weren't you, Irene?"

Irene laughed.

"Every one will think! And you even want me to make you think it, mother! I suppose the next step is for me to think I think it. I won't!" Color flamed in her cheeks. "You think he'll—stray off like this after we're married?"

"I'm convinced of it," Mrs. Fenton said.

Irene stood up, caught her reflection in the long mirror, and studied it for a moment before she spoke. So Charley wished she wasn't so beautiful! She lifted her head proudly, proud of her beauty, and of the power it gave her over him. He could continue to think her too beautiful! Mrs. Fenton stared at her, wondering if Irene had suddenly become more lovely, or if, merely, she had become accustomed to her daughter's loveliness. Her breath caught in her throat as Irene's shoulders straightened, her chin lifted high.

"What is it, Irene?"

Irene Fenton shrugged.

"You're so sure that this sort of affair will become a habit of Charley's, that you've convinced me I'd better learn to stop it right away," Irene answered. "I'm going over to Paris and—er—drag him back!" She swayed about, one hand on her hip, lips smiling. "The wedding preparations may continue, my dear!" She laughed, and suddenly bolted from the room.

Irene had not the faintest idea of what she was going to do in Paris. While she waited, in the two days before her steamer sailed, her mother reluctantly built up a convincing enough fabric of explanation. Charley's business—Irene's trousseau—separation—return together. A chaperon was obtained; a stateroom engaged; trunks packed; everything done, with the exception of sending an explanatory cablegram to Charley. This Irene steadfastly refused to do. She wanted time to think.

Arrived in Paris, her ideas were no more formed than they had been when she left Philadelphia. Not an idea; nothing but the overwhelming conviction that somehow, in some manner, she must bring Charley back with her. If he were really infatuated with this snake-charming lady, it was only one additional proof of his need for her. Charley was old enough to give up that sort of amusement. And just as she was convinced that her happiness lay with him, she was convinced that she could make Charley equally happy. This snake charmer could give him nothing that she could not give him! Or could she? That, then, was the first thing to do; the thing she must find out before Charley was to suspect her presence in Paris.

It was simple enough to find a man to escort her to the Paris-Russe. A pleasant, middle-aged gentleman, who

had crossed with her, was chosen. She told him that she was engaged, that her fiancé was in France—but not in Paris; she confessed a great desire to visit Montmartre. Her other visits to Paris had been as a schoolgirl, she explained. The Louvre, Notre Dame, Versailles. She had heard of this dancing place—a splendid orchestra, gay people, a cabaret.

She chattered rapidly, examined photographs of his son and daughter, his small grandchildren, his house, his factory, and, even, his automobile, while her eyes darted anxiously about the great colorful room for a sight of Charley. He was not there, and relief welled within her.

"This Russian craze is all over Paris," her companion informed her. "They say they're all nobility—waiters and taxi drivers and professional dancers. They— Hello, what's this?"

The orchestra had ceased in a wailing lament of the saxophones; lights dimmed and voices rose correspondingly—rounded, laughing, American voices, the sharp staccato of French. A thin, green light made the room appear to have submerged itself beneath the sea; a small Frenchman advanced to the center of the dance floor, lifted his arms in an imploring gesture for silence.

Irene translated, in an undertone, for her middle-aged friend. "—will dance—with the living serpent—" Her voice was husky, excited; it was drowned in the applause which followed the announcement.

Slowly the orchestra commenced its sound—a tune which crept into the room, sinuously, oily on its progress of slipping notes; the faint vibration of the drum was like the thumping of pulses, increasing steadily, imperceptibly. Then a blare, a shrill, cutting noise from a horn, and a woman rushed to the center of the floor, on bare, flat feet, which mimicked the drum beats in their impact upon the floor. Bare brown arms out-

stretched, head thrown back, torso bare and brown, and about a brown neck, following closely the curves of shoulders and arms, the serpent, his tail flicking hypnotically over the fingers of her left hand, his head, with its beady eyes and incessantly darting tongue, nestled in her right.

Applause, noisy, half drunken; the excited voices of Americans; the concise chatter of French. The woman's eyes gleamed, moist and brown, as she acknowledged it; her heavy black hair fluttered over her face, square white teeth shone against the submarine light, and she began to dance.

Irene did not know when it was that the dancer first noticed her; her own eyes, like the eyes of a hypnotized person, followed the woman about the room, bored, like searchlights, into the eyes of the half-caste. How long, she did not know, nor when it happened, but she was suddenly conscious that, from one end of the floor or the other, the dancer's gaze, furtive, hostile, flickered back to her.

"The lady seems to have taken a dislike to you, my dear," said the man beside her, and chuckled.

Irene did not speak; her eyes, contemptuous, defiant, disgusted, continued to seek those other eyes and beat them down. It was almost as though they recognized one another, she thought; as though this woman, who had never seen or heard of Irene Fenton, knew her for what she was.

"You do look rather as though you preferred the snake to the lady!"

Irene nodded shortly.

The woman was pivoting dizzily in the center of the room, the snake held high above her head in her outstretched hands, her eyes blurred until, in her rapid whirling, they seemed a circle of eyes, continued to seek Irene's face. She was coming nearer in her dance, nearer and nearer the table where Irene sat. Irene felt the touch of the man beside

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her on her arm, as though to pull her back, felt, for a second, the cold, slimy touch of something dragged across her cheek, in the instant before the dancer sank in an obeisance to the floor, with the snake wound, like a green collar, about her throat.

"It's all right—just the snake's tail—*Miss Fenton!*"

She was conscious, through her faintness, of the man's voice, but she did not move. Dizzily, her eyes remained fastened upon the Hindu, compelling her to look up. When their eyes met, brown and blue equally belligerent, equally loathing, Irene smiled, and continued to smile until the lights had flashed on again, the orchestra recommenced its playing, and the floor crowded with dancers.

"Now, I wonder what made that woman act that way?" Irene's companion asked mildly. He looked at Irene, as though a part of his wonder were directed toward her, and his face became concerned. "My dear child, you look ill. Shall I take you back to your hotel?"

"Please," said Irene.

In the cab, her cold hand pressed tightly over the spot on her cheek where the snake had touched her flesh, and she shivered. It was between herself and this woman—and it was she who must win! Long that night, she turned and moved in her bed, thoughts battling one another like armies.

"What would I do," thought Irene, "if I were that woman?" And she shuddered at the answer which came so promptly to fill her mind. She couldn't! She wasn't strong enough to go through with it! And yet—there was Charley. If she could prove to Charley that she, too, could be ruthless, equal in savagery to the half-caste— It was long before she could find sleep at all, and when she did, her sleep was troubled, broken. In the morning, it took physical effort to telephone Charley, to bind the

bargain she had made with herself and with the Hindu; and when she heard his surprised voice and knew that it was done, she felt herself grow cold, cold and damp, like the touch of the snake against her cheek.

Irene stirred her champagne with the little wooden stick and smiled faintly, as Charley's voice continued against the throbbing deliberation of the "Lime-house Blues." He was lying, of course; that he had been out of Paris for a month, and that only that morning the estate had been settled. French red tape. She couldn't believe him, but she loved him; she looked up and met his eyes; smiled her disbelief.

"Let's dance," she said diffidently.

She was careful to take the outside seat at the table when they returned to it, the seat nearest the floor. She talked, in a leisurely manner, of her shopping, commented absently upon the Paris-Russe, the dancers, while anticipation sent chills through her blood.

"And now what?" she asked lightly, as that green light which had haunted her dreams descended upon the room, as the orchestra commenced its whine. She must be brave—brave.

Charley chuckled.

"'Le Serpent Vivant'—the living snake!" he announced. "Funny people, the French. Every night—" He paused, as the dancer entered the room, sank, arms outstretched, in her obeisance.

The little red tongue of the snake darted in and out its open mouth incessantly; Irene watched it, fascinated, muscles tense. The woman rose; stood, poised, to commence her dance; her moist brown eyes, traveling with that furtiveness which seemed so a part both of herself and her serpent, reached their table. Irene turned to a still, white statue, while recognition of herself, the hated woman, preceded recognition of Charley. She saw, from the corner of

her eye, Charley's head incline; saw his smile, and heard the half-audible, "Good evening, Mimi," which his lips formed in greeting. So! Greater repulsion smoldered in Irene's face at the smile which slid over the brown countenance, which included her, with Charley.

The Hindu commenced her dance, and those quick glances, from beneath heavy lashes, slipped, with the regularity of the drum beats, toward Irene's contempt.

"Mimi seems a bit disturbed about something," remarked Charley, in the most casual of tones. "She——" He paused, and looked sharply at Irene.

The dancer had deposited her snake upon the slippery floor, little, cruel head facing toward them; she was surpassing herself in her dance; applause thundered, occasional cries of acclaim sounded from tables.

Irene looked only once at Charley. She had lived through this scene the evening before; she wanted only to make sure that in his face lay the cynical amusement, the speculation, which had lain there in her dreams. His eyes moved from the snake to her face; there was a faint interrogation of his eyebrows.

"Frightened, little daughter of civilization?" he asked her.

Irene turned away and sat very still; her eyes were fixed upon the long, green body, moving so slothfully toward her. Against that spot of the floor which her eyes commanded, the brown body of the dancer flashed in an occasional impassioned whirl.

Applause heightened; the very walls of the room seemed to clamor, and it was only when the head of the snake was less than an inch from Irene's white slipper, that a stillness fell. The dancer had redoubled her efforts; obviously, to every one in the room but Irene, she had forgotten her serpent, forgotten everything in the frenzy of her dance. Against the walls, people rose for a

clearer view; a voice, whispering, formed the words "the beautiful American;" whispers alone sounded against the wailing of the orchestra.

Charley might have spoken; Irene was not sure. She sat, not a muscle moving, hardly a pulse, until the head of the snake, with its scarlet tongue quivering in its mouth, touched the satin of her slipper, brushed against her ankle. It was no longer the dance of the Hindu and *Le Serpent Vivant*; Irene Fenton had become a definite part of the entertainment.

She pushed back her chair soundlessly, and, as she stood up, the white-lace scarf which had covered her shoulders fell to the floor. Charley—Charley! She leaned over, long white arms outstretched, and, as she had seen the Hindu, closed her two white hands about the body of the snake, raised him high in the air before her.

The room was more than soundless; it was as though each of the hundred or so spectators were holding his breath. As Irene's fingers closed about the serpent every atom of color drained from her face, left it as white as her dress. She had not known that anything could be so icy cold and yet live, as the thing which vibrated in her hands. Charley—Charley! It was only a moment, yet that moment was photographed indelibly upon every mind in the room; that instant when she stood there, a statue carved of marble, except for her hair, vibrantly golden and alive, and the serpent, heavy, sluggish, green.

The dancer had paused; as though it were part of her dance, she remained perfectly still while Irene, like a priestess, placed that long, green body about her shoulders. And, as though it had been many times practised, the serpent settled to its familiar resting place, curved its length against the curves of brown shoulders and arms, lay, quiescent, tail resting in the half-caste's left hand, head nestled against the fingers

of the right. The orchestra ceased; the Hindu bowed and ran rapidly backward from the floor, arms outstretched; lights and applause flamed simultaneously.

Irene did not look at Charley; she picked up the short stick of wood and stirred the champagne with which the waiter had refilled her glass.

"Let's get out of here!" said Charley.

She followed him silently; in the steep, dimly lighted little street outside the building, he pulled her into his arms.

"Irene, you're so—so beautiful!"

Correctly, of course, Charley should not have been there. He should have been attending a bachelor dinner—doing anything, rather than sitting in the living room of the little house in Philadelphia beside the woman who was to become his wife in the morning. But Charley was Charley. He was not correct; he did not do things as other people did. And he seemed—to Philadelphia—more absurdly in love with his fiancée than was necessary or proper to the occasion.

"Who do you suppose I ran into today, Irene?"

She nestled her head against his shoulder.

"Who, dear?"

"Tommy Drayton. Not that you know who he is," Charley chuckled. "A painter—used to know him in France. He's the man who was having the affair with Mimi—the *serpent vivant* lady—I used to run around with them in Paris, last month. Funny chap. They used to fight like tigers, too. Why—"

Irene sat up stiffly and looked at her lover. The man who was having the

affair with Mimi? Her eyes bored steadily into his face.

"Why, Charley," she began uncertainly, indignantly, and paused. He wasn't lying; somehow she was sure of that. And in his eyes, remembrance was lighting a wonder—a wonder tinged with admiration.

You were splendid that night, Irene!" he said. "I'll always be grateful to the gods that Mimi's disposition was so rocky, because it—well, it gave me you—a you that I wanted and hadn't known was there! You just stripped off all the—oh, the niceness that I've always been afraid of, and became a woman." He leaned forward and drew her to him. "You were magnificent, Irene!" he whispered. "I'll never forget you!"

Irene Fenton closed her eyes tightly, remembering, too, that evening, and the unforgettable, horrible coldness of the snake. And it had all been unnecessary; all that nightmare gone through without reason other than unfounded gossip!

"Why, Charley," she began again, and, as her eyes met his, understanding burst over her.

Unnecessary? In that moment, she felt that she could kiss the gossiping Madeline Warner for what she had done! Her fingers shut tightly, fiercely, over Charley's hand. Unnecessary, perhaps, so far as her actual intention was concerned, but as Charley had just said, unknowingly, it had given them one another!

"We must—must go to see Mimi—together—when we get to Paris," she said, and she never would explain to him the almost hysterical laughter which seized her.



SCENTED candles, delicately tinted to match the hostess' complexion or gown, are being used successfully at dinner parties. When lighted, the candles give off exotic odors reminiscent of the Orient or Egypt, which guests find most pleasing.

INARTICULATE

ALL day he treads the brown clods of the rows
And guides the plow's rough going with his hands,
Waiting at field's end where a soft wind blows
While the horse stands.

Always he watches with a lowered eye
The even turning of the parted earth,
Nor seems to heed the colors of the sky
Nor the lark's mirth.

Yet in his mind, as in a looking-glass,
Reflections are of clouds and winds and trees,
Of little lives that hide beneath the grass,
And the loud bees.

And if he could have graven with his plow,
And we could read as though it were his pen,
Perhaps we would be mindful of him now
Like other men.

CAROLINE AINSLIE.



SKY SONG

LEAN to me from the blue-gray night,
Lean to me and hold me;
Gather me as the deep sea takes
The little flitting snowflakes;
Gather and enfold me.

Lean to me and say no word,
Lean with breast of sighing;
Only lift and lay my cheek
On thy heart, and never speak
While my tears are drying.

CHRISTINE TURNER CURTIS.



SOMETIMES

THE child that once I used to be
Lives somewhere still in the maze of me.
Years have not made her staid or wise,
And suddenly, sometimes, her wide child eyes
Look at my world with an odd surprise,
And her small ears listen wonderingly
To the queer tall person she grew to be.

ELEANOR HAMMOND.



The Recrudescence of the Blantons

By Augusta Coxé Sanderson

Author of "In Defense of the Weak,"
"Ivory, Apes, and Peacocks," etc.

DRAWN up under an arc light on the Avenue at a corner in the Sixties, supervised by a handsome collie dog, a young man in an old army overcoat and overseas cap was tinkering lovingly with the insides of an automobile. It is only by courtesy that one might so designate the homely contraption, made chiefly of a sawed-down airplane body which had but a single narrow seat.

There was one tiny wheel, a mere toy, under its nose, while two other wheels outside behind allowed the slender, tailless body to rest almost upon the ground. There was no running board and no wind shield; only a long, rakish-looking craft built like a dragonfly's body—most obviously a homemade contrivance, the handiwork of the one who tinkered so concernedly.

Just as a policeman, sauntering under the trees of the Park opposite, started across the street to investigate, a young girl walked quickly down the side street. She wore a small, dark hat and a light coat of the variety known as polo.

The young mechanic looked up in surprise as she spoke to him in earnest, pleading tones.

"Oh, will you take me to Beltonico's? I am late."

Laddie looked from the girl to his master entreatingly. Surely——

The mechanic wiped his hands,

climbed into the seat, and started the engine; wonderful coördination of mind and muscle, as of one taught to obey. The collie, much pleased by his master's decision, leaped up behind him and watched with interested gaze.

"I'm sorry there is no room inside, but, if you can hang on, I'll get you there in no time. I've got an airplane engine."

"Hang on? Hang on to what?" She perched herself behind the dog.

"Well—er—just hang on to Laddie. He's solid."

"What's Laddie on?" she asked dubiously.

"The gasoline tank, of course. How'd you think we ran?" They barely missed the policeman as they whirled about, heading downtown.

"Ran?" the girl gasped insolently as she threw her arms about the dog. "I supposed the whole shebang went on hot air."

"But not all, not all!" she whispered into Laddie's ruff. He licked her face.

"Where did you pick up the canine?" she asked as they went into high.

"Man gave him to me. I fixed his fan belt once." The driver shouted back.

"Whose fan belt—the dog's?"

"No, the man's."

"Oh!" she gasped as Laddie looked down his nose circumspectly.

It being early evening they had a clear road on their side of the Avenue, meeting the endless pageant of uptown New York going home to dinner.

"Beltonico's, you say?" the young man asked in a puzzled voice as they sped through the Fifties. Everybody stared as they scuttled past, the girl's head barely at a level with the mudguards of ordinary, respectable cars.

"Got a date," she answered audaciously. "You see, James took the limousine without permission and my roadster is in the shop, getting a new platinum gasket or something."

"I beg your pardon!" the young man said stiffly. "I didn't mean to be curious." Laddie, too, sat more erect with dignity to match his master's.

"Well, you see"—she hesitated—"I've got a job." Her tone altered to seriousness. "Hat checker. This is my first night and I am late."

"We'll not be a minute now," he reassured her as they turned off at Beltonico's corner, the subdued lights glowing through shaded windows.

He stopped with a flourish, and, although all she had to do was put down a foot and step out, so low she was, she waited while he climbed out to help her descend, Laddie assisting soberly.

And then, although she had said that she was in mad haste to arrive, she now seemed in no hurry to enter. He had been inclined at first to think she was pretending. "Some flapper out to join a chap from the garage," he thought, remembering his soiled overcoat and khaki cap, and how he had lightly taken her on. Then at her quiet voice and dignified demeanor, as he watched out of the corner of his eye—despite her banter and her precarious perch there was no hysterical giggle and no loud laughter—he had decided she was some belated daughter of the rich seizing any opportunity to get to a late tea appointment.

But now as he stood above her under

Beltonico's canopy he couldn't make her out. He bared his head. Here was dignity, quiet beauty, self-respect, seriousness. He caught the glimpse of a plain uniform under her coat and a well-kept, ringless hand as she stooped to pat Laddie, standing in thoroughbred attention beside her.

"Thank you so much," she said, putting out her hand to him. "You don't know how grateful I am for your kindness. It was important that I get down here without any fuss, and you got me here."

"Well, but," her escort suggested smilingly, and Blair Prenderby could be engaging, "aren't you going to tell me who you are? Can't I—what time do you get off?"

"No, please!" she answered gravely, and there came a worried look into her brown eyes. "You see, this is my first night, and I don't know what time I shall go home—get off, I mean. Julia didn't say."

"Who is Julia?" he asked quickly.

"Oh, did I say Julia?" She was confused, frightened, he could see. "Julia's got a job here. I must go. Thank you again. Thank you, too, Laddie, for holding me on. Good-by." She ran up the steps and through the revolving doors.

"She ought not to go in that door if she has a job," the young man said to Laddie as he stood a moment. Then he, too, went up the steps and through the doors. The door man stopped him, looking pointedly at his messy overcoat.

"I just wanted to see that the young lady got in all right," he said deferentially.

"Said she was to meet her father," said the door man shortly.

"Right-o!" the young man answered as if satisfied, saluted, and turned about.

"Now, what the dickens, old man?" he asked the colliie on the sidewalk. "How does a check-room girl come here

to Beltonico's to meet her father, and what is she so frightened about?" Laddie looked uneasy.

He motioned the dog to his perch again, leaped in, and started the engine. Laddie looked at him concernedly while he sat thinking. Then he started on slowly, went around the block, and returned to stop again at Beltonico's, this time at the service door.

"Hey!" he called to an attendant standing by the door. "What time do the check-room girls get off?"

"Got a date?" the attendant parried.

"If I had a date, guess I'd know what time, wouldn't I?" the young man answered, grinning.

"Ten o'clock, they get off."

"Ten o'clock? Thanks!"

"What's her name?" persisted the attendant, treating it as a great joke.

"Princess Marie Louise, if you must know."

"Guess I'll stick around at ten, just to be mean," the man laughed as the little car scuttled off.

Prenderby drew up before his club—that club whose members were wont to declare that they spent four years getting through college just for the privilege of belonging to it, and then they had to spend almost as long getting into the club itself.

The door man came down the steps.

"Hello, Wilkins," Prenderby hailed him.

"Good evening, Mr. Prenderby. Would you mind—er—just pulling up a bit?"

"Not at all; park around the corner if you say so," he answered good-humoredly, seeing the point.

"That is not necessary, sir," Wilkins answered solemnly. "I'll keep an eye on it."

"Guess nobody will pick it up with Lad on the job." He threw his coat into the seat for the dog to lie on. "I'm going to take you for a ride some day, Wilkins."

"In that, sir?" Wilkins was horrified.

"Why not?" Laughing to himself at the mental picture of the scandalized Wilkins sitting on top, his legs dangling as he clutched Laddie for safety, Prenderby went inside.

Wilkins settled his collar with a firm hand. This doorkeeping job for a wealthy college club had its advantages, of course, but—— It was all very well if Mr. Prenderby wanted to make his old army plane over into *that*, and go out making a holy show of himself. He belonged to one of the first families, with wealth and position, houses and lands, and could afford to be seen in such a rattletrap. But he, Alonzo Henry Wilkins, had his family to think of! No; decidedly *no*! He wouldn't be caught dead in it. No!

Meanwhile, Prenderby had dinner, smoked, joined in a desultory game of bridge, smoked, yawned, looked at his watch, and smoked again.

Finally, at ten minutes before ten he went out, uncurled Laddie from the seat, and started, not home, but toward Beltonico's. At the service entrance he paused; stopped.

"After all," he said soberly to Laddie, "chaps like us have no right to make a girl conspicuous, have we, old man?"

Laddie licked his ear approvingly as they turned about and went home up the Avenue.

"Good morning, Grannet!" Prenderby saluted his lady grandmother early next morning, as she sat in her wheel chair. She smiled at him over her empty breakfast tray. "Laddie come in, too?" he asked, as the collie waited to be invited over the threshold.

"Yes, come along, Lad. How nice and clean you are!"

Lad sat up and gave her a gentlemanly paw. That dignified courtesy over, he leaped up and kissed her full in the face.

"You naughty dog, just like the rest

of your sex!" She laughed, while Lad, thoroughly enjoying their daily joke, sat watching.

"Seen the papers, Grannet?" Blair Prenderby was trying to appear unconcerned.

"No, and I should like to know what is in them that the silly servants tell me none has come. What is in them?" she repeated peremptorily.

"Me!" he answered solemnly. "I brought you one—the worst. They've all got it."

She looked at the heavy black headlines quickly.

WEALTHY GIRL DISAPPEARS FROM FASHIONABLE SCHOOL.

**Last Seen on the Avenue in Company
With Well-known Clubman.**

Guardians Fear Elopement.

"Oh, Blair!" She held out her arms.

"Part of it is true, but not their construction. It's beastly!" He struck the offending sheet savagely.

"Tell me!" she urged simply.

As they sat in their dainty boudoir he told her freely all there was to tell—about the girl appearing at his side, her urgent request, her banter on the ride down the Avenue, her seriousness and dignity at the last, even the door man's report that she had come to meet her father. It was as if time had turned back a score of years and the lonely little boy had come in again, with his dog, to talk over his childish troubles with Grannet. And now, as then, he knew that Grannet would listen and sympathize and advise.

"She is in trouble," he finished soberly.

"Trouble? What kind of trouble?"

The old lady, who was on the board of every girls' organization in the city, was alert.

"I don't know. She was game enough, but she was plainly frightened."

"Get me Beltonico's on the telephone, and ask for the head waiter."

But before he could obey her unexpected request the parlormaid came to announce that Mr. Forrest desired to see her.

"Mr. Forrest? Who is Mr. Forrest?" she queried.

"That is the name of the girl's guardian," Blair explained, touching the paper.

"Very well, Delia; you may tell him I will be down, and send some one to wheel me. You stay here, Blair, until I see what he has to say."

Mr. Forrest was looking with interest at the portrait of the "Swordsmen," Mrs. Lenyard's ancestor, who hung sword in hand upon her drawing-room wall—one of the "fighting Blantons," stripped to his shirt, a bloody kerchief knotted about his upper arm, and upon his clear-cut young face such a look of undaunted courage as might inspire any who had lost heart.

As the noiseless chair rolled in, Mrs. Lenyard had opportunity to study her visitor. Big, successful, he appeared, an outdoor man. "Not quite a gentleman," the fastidious might say. One accustomed, in his own circle, to speak while others listened. All her life old Mrs. Lenyard had got what she wanted by listening while others talked and then—getting what she wanted.

"Mr. Forrest? You wish to see me?"

"Yes, ma'am." He turned quickly and started in surprise at sight of her chair. "My ward, Miss Isabel Grant—" He showed her the morning paper, crumpled in his hand. "I read this on the train."

"Yes, Mr. Forrest?"

"Well, where is she?" he demanded.

"I am sure I cannot tell you that. I have only just seen this unfortunate account. My grandson is upstairs."

Mr. Forrest was plainly taken aback.

"Then he isn't with her? I supposed — That is why I asked for you."

"Should you like to speak to Mr. Prenderby?"

"I certainly would—yes, ma'am!"

Mrs. Lenyard rang and sent for her grandson who came immediately. Mr. Forrest leaped toward him.

"Where is Isabel?" He demanded.

"Miss Grant, I suppose you mean? I do not know."

"Well, there's law in this city, I suppose. They'll make you tell."

"You are wrong. No law on earth can make me tell what I don't know. Get that straight." Prenderby was cool. "But, if you will sit down and give me a chance, I am perfectly willing to tell you what I do know. Otherwise"—he shrugged competent shoulders—"you will find out the best way you can."

"Excuse me. My mistake! This has been a big blow to me." He sat down obediently and Blair told him what he had previously told his grandmother—as far, that is, as Beltonico's door.

"You say you left her there?"

"Yes; she left me, rather."

"Did anybody meet her?"

"Not that I saw."

"You say she left you. Where did she go?"

Both Blair and his grandmother realized he was on thin ice. Strangely enough, they both—conventional, law-abiding citizens as they were—instinctively sought to protect from her guardian a strange girl, a girl who had patently told one untruth, at least.

"She went inside," Blair answered after a moment.

"Inside what?"

"Beltonico's door. A revolving door."

"Did you see her again?"

"I did not."

"You didn't make a date with her?" Suspicion sprang up once more.

"No!" He omitted the fact that he had tried. "I did not. I didn't even know her name, nor that she had left school, or anything about her at all. And I am sure she did not about me, until this morning's paper. And you saw that. She said she was in a hurry and

we went down pretty fast in the little car." He didn't tell the important Mr. Forrest just how small the car was.

"What did you talk about?"

"Not much of anything, except the car. I remember she called it a 'shebang.' It is rather disreputable." He laughed. "And we talked about my dog. He isn't at all disreputable."

"She didn't tell you where she was going?"

"No, except that she wanted to go to Beltonico's. I went directly to my club. You can verify that, if you care to do so. And I want to say here—this paper calls me 'a well-known young clubman.' I am not. I belong to this one only. I had dinner there and spent the evening, until a bit before ten. Then I came home. You can verify that, too, if you like."

"Well, thank you, Mr. Prenderby. I'll take your word," the older man said grudgingly. "I am sorry I rubbed you the wrong way at first. But I am worried. You see, besides being Miss Grant's guardian I—well—I don't want all this newspaper talk. It doesn't look any too good to the folks out West. They like to get something on a public man, if they can."

"But the people at the school; the girls?" suggested Mrs. Lenyard.

"No, ma'am," he answered hastily. "I don't intend to go near the Footes. I paid 'em well and I told 'em what they could expect. If they couldn't keep her from running away, when I warned"—he stopped in confusion—"when they knew I was coming, I don't think it would do any good, my seeing 'em." Again he seemed in danger of losing his temper.

"Who put this fool thing in the papers. I'd like to know? I don't suppose you did?" he burst out.

"It is not likely," Blair answered. "I am getting notice I don't hanker for. This account says the policeman at the corner saw us start off and told the

school authorities, who followed her immediately. They could have got us, if they had tried. The most unfortunate thing about it is the notoriety for Miss Grant, of course."

"Well, she's not going to be Miss Grant——" Again he stopped himself. "She will not be here to be hurt by newspaper gossip. I came East to take her back home."

"She evidently doesn't want to go. Just where is your home, Mr. Forrest?" It was not Mr. Forrest's home that Blair desired to learn about, but that of the girl.

"Bell Lock, Lambsden County, Oklahoma, is where I come from," returned the other with more than a touch of pride. "And, say, we've got the finest little city in the State. Electric lights, artesian well system, streets all paved. We've got more automobiles per capita than any other town in the U. S. I've just built a new house, stone and brick, a whole city block, and I've got a lawn. You'd have to live in Lambsden County to know what that means. All irrigated and blue grass. Why, I've got more'n an acre of it. A garage——"

"Any iron dogs on the lawn? I noticed Miss Grant was fond of dogs," Blair interrupted the flow.

Forrest looked at him sharply, but saw no cause for offense.

"She was raised out that way; it is her home," he said simply. "Her folks are dead. Her father was my partner, and a finer man never stepped than Jim Grant." He looked at his watch and sprang to his feet. "I ought not to be sitting here talking about Lambsden County when I don't know where the girl is. But I hope you will come out and see it some time. I don't know just what to do next."

"I should think the best thing would be to make inquiries at the restaurant—Beltonico's," Mrs. Lenyard suggested.

"Yes, ma'am, I thought about that. That's just what I will do." Plainly

Mr. Forrest was accustomed to taking full credit for what thinking was done in his vicinity. "I'll be at the Plaza. If anything turns up, I hope you will let me know, and I will do the same."

"Do, please. I shall be interested to hear," Mrs. Lenyard assured him.

Mr. Forrest bent over her chair to give her a large, soft hand; then, with a final glance at Swordsman Blanton, he bowed himself out. But he stood upon her stone steps while he leisurely lighted a cigar, quite evidently disposed to make the most of leaving the house of a "well-known Fifth Avenue resident," as the paper had called Mrs. Lenyard.

"Well, there is something wrong here," said Mrs. Lenyard when the door had closed after their visitor. "Whatever is the secret of this affair, I am against him. We must find the girl before he does."

"Good old Grannet!" said Blair, kissing her.

"Get Beltonico's on the telephone, and ask for the head waiter. I'll talk to him." The old lady's voice was that of one accustomed to weight in board rooms.

"But I doubt if you can find out anything. There will be a different door man on at this time of day, and she probably did not go into the dining rooms at all."

"Get me the head waiter!" she repeated. And then on the "shoe-string" knowledge of a girl's name—Julia—she found the girl she sought.

"Four hundred and ten East, you say? Thank you, that is quite sufficient," she finished and turned to Blair. "Come! You must go down to the East Side. Take my car—yours is too conspicuous after the morning's papers. If Miss Grant is there, tell her that, if she needs help, I am on her side. If she seems dubious, you can tell her about the girls' work I have done all these years. Ask her frankly what the trouble is, and tell her my lawyer, Crowe, is a

good man if she wants any advice. Tell her about Forrest's call and warn her to keep away from Beltonico's. Meanwhile, I shall telephone Crowe for an appointment, and she can come here at any time that is convenient for him. Run along, now. I've got work to do—heaps of it."

Blair left with a light step and a lighter heart than he had had since reading the papers, and Mrs. Lenyard turned her belated attention to her desk. When all was finished and neatly put into pigeonholes, she glanced at the clock and realized that Blair must be finding his errand a pleasant one.

Hardly, however; had she realized the passage of time before he returned, his face aglow with interest, his voice athrill with sympathy.

"The poor child is in trouble, Gran-net, but she says she can't tell us what it is. She has promised somebody. There's two days more of it. She can tell on the eighteenth, and this is the sixteenth. But I am afraid Forrest will get to her. She swears she won't go home with him. It is something about him, but I couldn't make it out. She wants to see Crowe and I told her to stay there until she heard from us and, if Forrest came, not to let him in. She is staying with Julia's family. Julia was a maid at the school—which she says was not a school—and is her only friend in New York—that is, until she met us."

Mrs. Lenyard smiled at the "us" which finished his breathless recital, but she did not remind the headlong young man that, as yet, she had not seen Miss Isabel Grant.

"Mr. Crowe will be here at three o'clock. Let us have luncheon and you can go down for her in time to meet him."

But luncheon was delayed by another visitor. Delia, the parlor maid, appeared to say that Miss Foote wished to see either Mrs. Lenyard or Mr. Prenderby.

Together they went to the drawing-

room to see the third person in the triangle which had so interrupted the morning's calm.

"We seem to be the storm center for all parties, but let us not tell her where the girl is, either," the old lady whispered as Blair wheeled her in.

But Miss Foote, a large, competent woman of middle age, evinced no interest in the whereabouts of her late charge.

"I am sorry to trouble you, madam," she announced in a large, booming voice, "but I felt that I ought to warn you."

Mrs. Lenyard smiled encouragingly from her chair, but made no answer to the challenge.

"Miss Grant has been in my house for the past six months."

Again Mrs. Lenyard smiled.

"Her guardian, Mr. J. L. Forrest, arrived in New York this morning. He has not communicated with me, in spite of the unfortunate account in the papers, which he must have seen. Have you, may I ask, heard from him?"

Mrs. Lenyard thought quickly. Whatever the situation, she felt in no wise bound to keep Mr. Forrest's secrets.

"Mr. Forrest called upon us this morning."

"Had he found her?"

"Not at that time."

"Do you know where he is?"

"He said he would be at the Plaza."

"Thank you!" she boomed. "He has not kept his agreements with me at any time. Miss Grant has been a sore trial to me. I am quite sure that she deceived Mr. Prenderby by her plausibility." She entirely ignored Blair's presence and spoke of him as if absent. "It is Mr. Forrest's concern to find her, not mine. I've done! Thank you! Good morning!"

"Succinct! Concise! Final!" said Blair when she had left the drawing-room with dignified tread. "Oh, Gran-net, to think of that poor child being caught between those two people—For-

rest and this one. No wonder she had been crying this——"

But Miss Foote had turned back at the street door and came in once more to launch a thunderbolt from the threshold.

"You are probably not at all interested, but I received a telegram from Miss Grant this morning, saying that she had been married."

"Married?" Blair burst out. "But I have just come from seeing her and she told me——"

"Blair!" His grandmother warned him to silence.

"Oh, it is of no consequence to me, I assure you." They could not but believe Miss Foote's sincerity. "I felt I ought to warn you. The telegram said: 'Am married. All promises canceled. Arrive New York Thursday evening.' That is to-morrow. It was signed Isabel Grant Maitland. What she means by promises I do not know. I made none. Good morning!" She was gone before they could recover their wits.

"It can't be!" said Blair. "Forrest said something of the same kind and I asked her point-blank and she said definitely—but, oh, by Jove, she said she was not *going to be married*." He smiled ruefully.

"Well, I believe we shall need Mr. Crowe's help to get it all straightened out. He will be here at three." Mrs. Lenyard spoke with pardonable perplexity.

"Yes, we certainly need old Crowe. Oh, Granret, you will like her, I know. Now, let's eat!"

"Yes, I shall feel better when I have had my luncheon," she answered.

And it was quite a gay little cavalcade that went rolling along to the dining room—Mrs. Lenyard in her chair, propelled by Blair and escorted by the delighted Laddie.

There was a rule in Mrs. Lenyard's house, fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians, that no messages were

to be delivered while the family was at meals. But, like all laws, this was to be broken on occasions, and when the perturbed Delia came in after answering an insistent ringing of the telephone, Mrs. Lenyard was moved to ask what was wanted.

"It was a young lady, madam," Delia answered, obviously relieved. "She said it was most urgent. Miss Grant, she——"

But before she could finish Blair was at the instrument.

"Well, of all the——" he was heard to say in astonishment. "Where are you now? Can you lock the door? Good, I will be right down. If anything more happens, get a taxi and come here. 'By!' He slammed up the receiver and made for the door, flinging information to Mrs. Lenyard as he went.

"Forrest has had her kidnaped—sent her word we wanted her. But the fellow stopped to telephone and she got away. I'll bring her here this time."

Blair, until now, had been only a rather indifferent young man, somewhat amused, but wholly sincere in his efforts to assist a woman whom chance had thrown in his way. He had been ready to do whatever Mrs. Lenyard suggested, but he had been quite without initiative in the matter.

But now with Isabel's message there had come to him the look of the fighting Blantons. He knew what he wanted. The day's shocks, the newspaper accounts, and the girl's abduction, made him realize fully, aside from any sympathy for a damsel in distress, that he was in love with Isabel Grant. And that knowledge made of him, too, a fighting Blanton, and, although the day of swords had passed, his spirit and his courage were no less invincible.

"In spite of his talk of the lawn and the garage, Forrest wasn't such a fool," Mrs. Lenyard exclaimed. "Though he will find kidnaping isn't such a simple affair."

But she discovered that she was talking to emptiness. Blair was gone long since, and she roused to the realization that she, too, had work to do.

Her first act was to call the Plaza and ask for Mr. Forrest. He was reluctant to come at once, as she requested, and asked what was wanted. When she assured him that it was urgent and could not be discussed over the telephone, he grudgingly agreed to come as soon as he could.

She smiled grimly as she telephoned to Miss Foote with the same insistent request.

"We need to get all parties together," she reflected. "It will be a lively interview, and I only hope that David Crowe will get here in time to talk it over first."

But Blair and Miss Grant were the first to arrive and, as they dashed up to the door in the little sawed-down airplane, there was none of the banter of the previous evening. It was a white-faced, trembling girl he led into the drawing-room and up to the portrait of the "Swordsman."

Mrs. Lenyard watched her silently as she looked about her apprehensively.

"She is really a beautiful girl," she thought; "or would be without that air of fright. She is like that trapped small animal I once saw in the North Woods."

"There!" Blair was pointing to the portrait, hanging in the full glow from the western window. "That's the fellow for you to pattern after. He wasn't afraid! Do you think Forrest and all his Oklahoma influence could have intimidated him?"

Her slender shoulders had straightened, her head went up, and in her eyes was reflected something of the dauntless spirit of the pictured face.

"Who is that?" she asked. "Is it a real person?"

"It is my great-grandfather," Mrs. Lenyard answered from her chair. "He was a young man at the time of the

Revolution. Then men learned to fight."

"I was afraid. Your grandson"—she smiled up at him—"will tell you that I came here determined to give up. But now that I've seen that picture, I am going to fight, too. I know I am right. I am sorry I can't tell you all about it, but it is not my secret."

She came closer and bent over the old lady's chair.

"I must apologize for the fibs I told last night. I had no job at Beltonico's. Julia was there in the check room, and, while she is just a servant, she was my only friend in New York. I ran away from Miss Foote's and I had no money to take a cab and I was afraid."

"Do you mind telling me, my dear, why you dislike Mr. Forrest? I mean before this escapade this morning?"

"Do you think any young girl would like a man as old as he is, as opinionated, as dictatorial as he is? A man who wouldn't allow her a single friend of her own age, either girl or boy? Who wouldn't allow her to have a cent; who had her watched day and night by some one who disliked her; a man who tried to force her to do—well, something very much against her will?"

"No, I am sure she could not. But you spoke of being afraid of him?"

"Yes, I was," she said frankly. "I was afraid to see him when he came before the time he agreed to wait, but, as it is not my secret, I can't tell you why, until I have asked the lawyer's opinion. I promised to wait until the eighteenth of April, when the Grant estate is to be settled. He is the trustee and guardian. And he came ahead of time to get me——"

She was interrupted by Delia who announced a visitor to Mrs. Lenyard.

"You go with Mr. Prenderby, my dear, until I send for you."

Isabel and Blair hastened from the drawing-room just as Mr. Forrest was ushered in at the opposite end.

Forrest had been all suavity upon his previous visit, but now he had all the bristling manner of a man intent upon trouble. Without preface he plunged into the fray as he leaned over Mrs. Lenyard's chair and did not notice Blair's quiet reëntrance.

"I have had enough of your meddling, ma'am. You thought you would put one over on me, did you, telephoning to Beltonico's? I'd never have found her if you hadn't. But when I got there they thought it was coming pretty thick, you asking for the Julia girl and me asking for Isabel. You and Isabel were in the papers together, so they could add two and two, and a little money did the rest. Money talks even in New York, and I ain't the one to hold back when I get what I want. It only took four bits to find out down there on the East Side that a big fine car had stopped and a young man had called on Julia's family on the top floor. I may be from the West where we have iron dogs on the lawn, but I get what I pay for."

"Meaning?" Mrs. Lenyard asked sweetly when he stopped at last for breath.

"Meaning that I paid the fellow at the restaurant and I got what I wanted. I paid the kids on the street down there and sent a man who got what I wanted there. I paid Jim Grant. I carried him when he didn't have a second suit of clothes to his back. I paid his bills when he had a sickly wife; I grubstaked him more'n once. I started him on his first hundred dollars and I was the brains of the outfit—Grant and Forrest—when he cleaned up his millions. Do you think I did all that for my health?"

"No, I suppose not. But for what?"

"For the same reason I built my house, and the lawn, and the garage you thought was so interesting. A shanty has always been good enough for me. But I built the house and I staked Jim Grant for—*Isabel*."

Mrs. Lenyard did not take advantage of the opportunity his silence presented and he continued after a moment.

"Oh, you think I can't see the way the wind blows, eh? You think you'll get Isabel away from me—you and your grandson, here? What business of his is it, anyway? I'm going to marry Isabel Grant. I wanted her to marry me before she came East, but she—well, she wasn't ready. I told her I would let her alone until she was twenty and then I would come after her. I told her I'd get her in spite of hell and high water and I've done it!"

This was a clear reference to the abduction, but they chose for the moment to ignore it.

"Yes, ma'am, I've done it." He repeated the offensive statement in the manner of one rubbing it in.

"But what if she is married already?"

They all turned at the sound of a new voice. Miss Foote stood just within the door, ushered in by the maid.

"Married already?" He almost whispered the words, with a threatening glance at Blair.

Miss Foote handed him the telegram. He read it and crumpled it contemptuously.

"Maitland," he muttered, and shook his head as if there were no such person in all the world.

"It is just like you, J. L.," Miss Foote remarked, "to ask the favor you did of me last fall, and then to come to New York without even coming to the house. It is quite like your old tricks."

"I would have come if you had kept your part of the bargain, but you let her get away."

"Yes, I gave her a sporting chance. I never liked her, but I am glad she succeeded."

"Oh, she succeeded, did she?" he cried with the air of one playing a trump card. "You will find out soon enough!"

Blair had slipped out and now he flung open the door and announced: "Here is Miss Grant."

She came in a bit timidly, after all.

Isabel saw Miss Foote first and shrank back; then, catching sight of Mrs. Lenyard, she came swiftly to her side.

"Oh," she said in a relieved tone, "I began to think it was another trap. This is your lawyer, I suppose?" she went on with a glance toward Forrest who had started forward with outstretched hands, and then stopped in confusion.

"What's this?" he demanded, truculence in voice and gesture. "Is it a frame-up? That's not Isabel Grant!"

Mrs. Lenyard held her arm about the trembling girl's waist.

"It certainly is the young lady your man kidnaped this morning," she answered calmly.

"And it is certainly the young lady I took to Beltonico's," Blair insisted in amazement.

"It is Isabel Grant," Miss Foote added. "She has been in my house for six months."

"But I tell you I never saw this girl before!" Forrest advanced threateningly, but the swordsman's descendant stepped before him.

"Suppose we let her tell us who she is," Blair said firmly.

For a moment the girl looked frightened and buried her face in her hands, but it was a moment only, until she had regained her courage.

"I am not Isabel Grant," she said in a low voice. "I am Mary Randall, Isabel's cousin."

"Where's Isabel?" Forrest demanded.

"At my home in Oklahoma, with my father," she answered bravely. "She has never been here at all. I came in her place."

"But——" Forrest turned in bewilderment to Miss Foote.

"I don't know, J. L." That lady disclaimed all responsibility. "I had never

seen your ward. I supposed she was the girl you asked me to look out for."

"Will you explain, miss?" As he turned upon her Forrest's voice was at once a command and an insult.

"I will," she answered without flinching; "and it was just that manner of yours toward Isabel that made her appeal to my father and that led to my coming here in her place."

"I'm waiting," he answered in a somewhat mollified tone, but without apology.

"Isabel was afraid to come to New York; afraid of the city, and afraid to come so far away, to be among your friends, alone"—she indicated Miss Foote—"thinking you could compel her to marry you as you threatened. I had always been wild to come East, but my father is an invalid and very poor, and so, in order not to arouse your suspicions, to leave Isabel with my father, I took her ticket and came here. I have been Isabel Grant and I meant to be until Isabel comes of age in two days and the property is hers. But you spoiled everything by coming sooner than you promised."

"I had my reasons," Forrest answered defiantly.

"Yes! Father has found out some of them. Oh, you don't know father, but he knows you, and he has found out all about how you cheated Uncle Jim and about the girl in Texas. His lawyer, Mr. Maitland——"

"Maitland?" Miss Foote extended the telegram. "Read that!"

The girl glanced at the proffered yellow slip.

"Oh, she did do it, then? She wasn't sure the last time I heard." Her burst of girlish enthusiasm lent her a rare beauty. "This is Bob Maitland, the lawyer's son, and his partner. He and Isabel fell in love with each other at first sight, but she told him she wouldn't marry him until they had found out the truth about her father's affairs."

"Oh, Mr. Forrest!" She went over to where he sat collapsed in his chair. "I feel sorry for you when father and Bob Maitland get here to-morrow night, but you ought to realize it wasn't fair. Why—why, you are as old as my father. And that reminds me. Father isn't going to be so very proud of me when he finds out how I lost my courage—once." She smiled whimsically up at the swordsman and then at Blair.

"Well, J. L., I guess you have got what you deserved this time." Miss Foote assumed charge of the situation. "When you have settled up this Grant property you will have to go home and begin all over again. But you don't get the girl—either the real Isabel or this one. But"—she laughed her booming laugh—"if I am any judge, this one will not be long in following Isabel's example."

Blair had wheeled Mrs. Lenyard to the west window and, as he and Mary

Randall stood by her chair, they were all three looking with unseeing eyes across the Avenue at the trees in the Park, waving young leaves in the afternoon breeze.

"I guess they've got me!" Forrest spoke resignedly.

"They've got you—and they've got each other." Miss Foote smiled.

"Blair," said Mrs. Lenyard some months later, "I have decided to give you and Mary the 'Swordsman' for a wedding present, and you may take my car for your honeymoon, if you like."

"Thank you, Grannet!" Blair kissed her. "Mary and I love the picture more than anything you could give us, but as for the car—why, Mary won't listen to any plan except the little sawed-down airplane. I've had another seat put in and she can ride inside now. And there is a place for Laddie, too. Oh, it is a real car now."



PURSUIT

I AM going away, away!
Why do you follow after?
To touch a trail of flying hair
And hear wild laughter?

You would not share it if you could—
This sudden madcap mirth
Of darting down the steepest hill
With scarcely foot to earth.

You were born for level places,
Shaded, sheltered, cool;
A sun-flecked lawn, low voices,
Tea and a lily pool.

I am drunk with the sun, the wind,
Mad with the breath of sea.
You may chase wild laughter and touch blown hair,
But you can't catch me!

ELEANOR MATHEWS STEVENS.

Talks With Ainslee's Readers

STATISTICS are notoriously a bore.

The outstanding exception occurs, however, when the mathematical facts tease or flatter the human interest. When a man finds rather sensationally interpreted for him the things he has always taken for granted, he warms to the information.

THE philosopher, of whatsoever persuasion, will tell you, all other considerations aside, that it is better far to be happy than to be pessimistic. The optimistic attitude takes you farther. The smile, whether it be in your voice as you talk over the telephone, in accordance with popular dictum, or practiced while you meditate in the subway car, or while facing the matutinal onslaught, wins, we are told. Secretly, we've cherished for a long while the conviction that the whole constitutes a mawkish philosophy, unless, of course, leavened by good sense.

AT last, however, comes the real, the genuine, the respectable practical reason why it is more worth your while to smile than to frown. And herein the statistician will find great justification. The real pragmatic value of the smile over the frown lies in this, that it takes thirteen muscles to make a smile, and sixty-five to make a frown. Immediately there rise in one's mind countless reasons why the smile and the cheerful philosophy that it bespeaks are actually the wise man's indulgence. If conservation of human energy, as a contemporary economist recently points out in a practical, albeit learned, volume on

the subject, is the real present-day economic need of the world, then the gospel of the smile is a preliminary word worth speaking.

ALWAYS one finds in a given group of people one at least, who believes with the hedonists, that pleasure is the real end of all living, that a smiling attitude toward life, which regards each encounter as an adventure, be it serious contretemps or happy event, is the only real philosophy. About such a group of young people Beatrice Ravenel has written her latest novelette, called "The Archipelago of Chance." Here is a tale of adventure and youthful exuberance of spirit which gives the lie to all more crotchety philosophies, which in the reading quickly mellows the more acrid, calculating mental attitude which we all at times foster in ourselves. This stimulating tale of adventure and joyful encounter will appear in an early issue. We suggest that you watch for it.

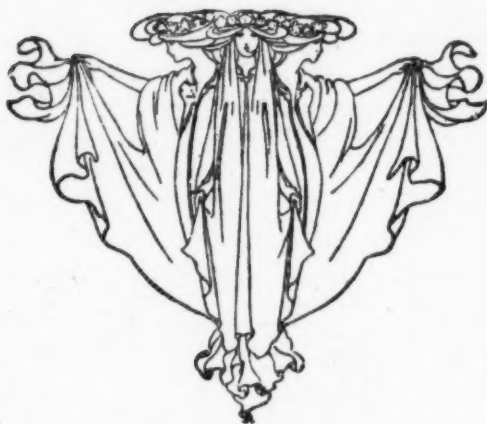
SEVERAL years ago there appeared in AINSLEE's a spritely series of tales by a popular English author. They brought enthusiastic comment even from a war-exhausted public. We refer to the group of tales, intriguingly called "Her Feet Beneath Her Petticoat," by F. E. Baily. Mr. Baily, busy with getting out a magazine in his native England, writes fewer of his charming tales than we wish he did. Always they are bewitching. We have been exceedingly gratified in the acquisition of his latest short story, a rollicking tale of a

gorgeously young and sometimes excessively foolish young married couple. The story is called "Rolling On," and it is winsome and gay and in the end poignantly moving. You will find it complete in the June number.

to who committed the foul deed. And then one day in a cool, lovely garden, he stumbled suddenly on what the widow of the dead man believed to be the fact in the case. You will seldom read a more absorbing story of mystery and love.

FOR the same number Rice Gaither wrote for you from sunny France a dramatic tale called, "The Last Shadow." It is the gripping story of a man who had been near the scene of a midnight murder committed at a fashionable hotel. He all but saw the crime committed. And for several years afterward he shared the discussion as

IN an early issue you will find, too, the following stories by favorite authors: "Accolade," by Valma Clark, a tale of Monte Carlo and pirates and youthful love, the ingredients actually more compatible than they sound; "Triumph," a strong story by Berthe K. Mellett; "Phosphorescence," by Theda Kenyon, and stories by authors new to AINSLEE'S.





"IN FEBRUARY OF THIS YEAR (1924) my third baby was born. Three months later found me with constipation, headaches and just dragging around—and *three small children*. I decided something had to be done. I started taking Fleischmann's Yeast, a cake morning and night. In a few weeks I was able to stop the use of cathartics; headaches and backaches were gone; and I had plenty of energy. I felt like a different woman."

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Eat two or three cakes a day before meals: on crackers—in fruit juices or milk—or just plain. *For constipation especially, dissolve one cake in hot water (not scalding) night and morning.*

Buy several cakes at a time—they will keep fresh in a cool dry place for two or three days. All grocers have Fleischmann's Yeast. Start eating it today!

Let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Health Research Dept. Z-16, The Fleischmann Co., 701 Washington St., New York.



A FAMOUS FOOD for health—
start eating it today



"AS A CHILD I HAD developed acne of the face, which became chronic in spite of medical care and good hygiene. Our family doctor advised trying Fleischmann's Yeast. I took it regularly for six months. . . . My face cleared, I lost that thin, pale look, and was able to continue with my work at college."

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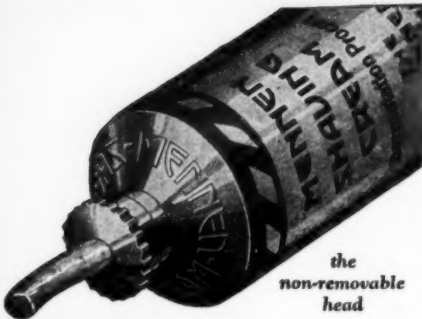
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Others have tried to denature the capricious cap. Mennen has abolished it.

Just move the Mennen knob a quarter turn and a hole magically appears. After you've squeezed out enough cream, another quarter turn closes the hole as tight as a drum. No threads to engage, no bother of any kind.

It's a knock-out—as far ahead of other sealing devices as Mennen Shaving Cream is ahead of the procession.

We've called this new patented feature "the plug-tite top." We want a better name. If you can suggest one we like, we'll send you a hundred dollars. If more than one submits the winning name, each one will get the century check.

To everyone who sends a suggestion we'll mail a complimentary tube of Mennen Skin Balm, the cooling, healing after-shave cream that's fragrant and greaseless.

Let me hear from you. Contest closes July first. Use the coupon, if it's handier.

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Jim Henry, c/o The Mennen Company
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I suggest the name _____

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Terror stricken is no name for the condition of the man who finds himself in the path of such an inexorable mass.

In the beginning of this story there is such a stampede. A man and a girl are caught in it and from that very moment there is action of the most thrilling sort right through to the end of the book.

Mr. Horton has done an extremely good piece of work. No one who reads "The Man of the Desert" can possibly deny him credit for it.

The Man of the Desert

By Robert J. Horton

Price, \$2.00 net

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CERTAINLY, there is a big difference in batteries. You'll realize it once a Prest-O-Lite Battery powers the electric system of your car. Not only in the quick, live response at first. But after months and months of service, the same dependable power is there. The same eager power that spins the coldest motor; that keeps your lights bright, and your horn loud and cheerful!

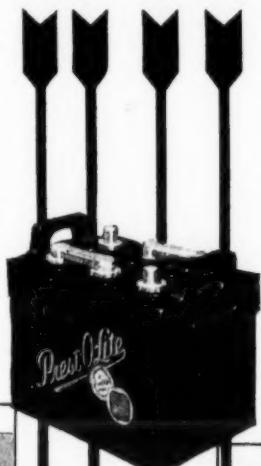
And there is a big difference in the price too. Standard Prest-O-Lite Batteries sell for only \$15.50 and up—truly amazing values when you consider that there is no

better battery built at any price.

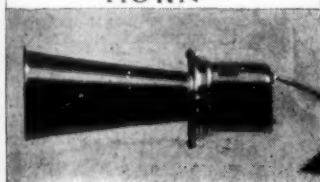
Think of these differences when you buy a battery for your car. Get a Prest-O-Lite—a battery that bears the approval of the world's largest electro-chemical battery research laboratories—that is initial equipment on a growing list of America's famous cars—and that is serviced by one of the largest organizations known to motorists. Ask, especially, to see the new Prest-O-Lite Super-Service Battery.

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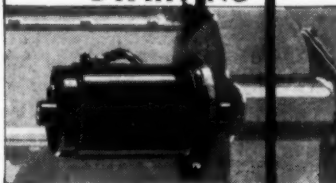
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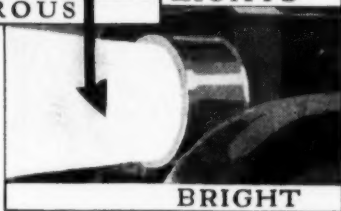
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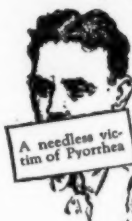


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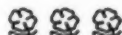
Forhan's
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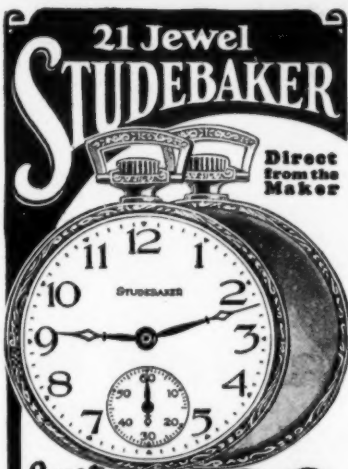
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"I worked 6 days, 6 hours a day, and made \$123 selling 'Stay-Prest' Trousers Pressers."

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"Stay-Prest" Trousers Presser sells quick to every man—thousands in use. Men and women are cleaning up big profits with this fast seller. Sells on sight. Priced low. Big cash profit for you. You take orders. We deliver. Your profit in advance. **Wonderful New Invention.** Folds perfect creases in trousers. Takes out wrinkles and baggy knees. Easy to use—takes less than half minute. Folds into small size. Saves clothes and tailor bills.

Make Big Profits—Others Do. Earl Ames made \$24 in four hours. Randle sold 25 the first day. Mary Roberts made \$10 in one evening. Others making big profits in spare or full time. So can you. You risk nothing. We **FREE** start you. Write quick for **FREE** selling outfit and full details of money-making selling plan.

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You may choose from \$4 new Art Beauty Cases and 8 handsome dial designs. 8 adjustments—to the second—for heat, cold, isochronism and 5 positions. Sold direct from the maker at lowest prices ever named for equal quality. Mail coupon today for Free Book and Special Offer.

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Falling Hair Stopped - New Hair Grown In 30 Days - Or No Cost!

By **ALOIS MERKE**

Founder of Famous Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, New York

SAVE yourself from baldness! No matter how fast your hair is falling out—no matter how little of it is now left—no matter how many treatments you have tried without results—I have perfected a new scientific system that I absolutely guarantee will give you a new head of hair in 30 days—or the trial costs you nothing!

I have found during many years research and from experience gained in treating thousands of cases of baldness at the Merke Institute, Fifth Avenue, N. Y., that in most cases of loss of hair, the roots are not dead—but merely *dormant*.

It is useless and a waste of time and money to try and get down to these undernourished roots with tonics, massages, crude oil, etc., etc., for such measures only treat the surface of the skin.

But my scientific system involves the application of entirely new principles in stimulating hair growth. It penetrates below the surface of the scalp and gets right to the cause of most hair troubles—th starving dormant roots, and provides not only an efficient way of reviving and invigorating these inactive roots, but of giving them the nourishment they need to grow hair again. And the fine thing about my system is the fact that it is simple and can be used in any home where there is electricity without the slightest *discomfort or inconvenience*.

Positive Guarantee

Of course there are a few cases of baldness that nothing in the world can cure. Yet so many hundreds of men and woman whose hair was coming out almost by "handfuls" have seen their hair grow in again as the shrunken roots acquired new life and vitality that I am willing to let you try my treatment at my risk for 30 days. Then if you are not more than delighted with the new growth of hair

produced, write to me immediately. Tell me my system has not done what I said it would. And the 30-day trial won't cost you a cent!

Free Booklet Tells All

The very fact that you have read this announcement shows that you are anxious about the condition of your hair. So why not investigate? Find out for yourself. That's the only common-sense thing to do. If you will merely fill in and mail the coupon I will gladly send you without cost or obligation a wonderfully interesting booklet which describes in detail my successful system which is growing new hair for thousands all over the country. Clip and mail the coupon today.

Allied Merke Institutes, Inc., Dept. 425, 512 Fifth Avenue, New York City.

**ALLIED MERKE INSTITUTES, Inc., Dept. 425
512 Fifth Ave., New York City**

Please send me—without cost or obligation—a copy of your book, "The New Way to Grow Hair," describing the Merke System.

Name.....(State whether Mr., Mrs., or Miss)

Address

City.....State.....

PROOF!

Hair About Gone

"My hair had been falling for the last two years and I had hardly any more hair on the front of my head. But since I started using your treatment I am raising a new crop of hair. Your treatment is best I ever saw." — O. J., Northbridge, Mass.

Falling Hair Checked

"My hair was coming out at an alarming rate but after four or five treatments I noticed this was checked. My hair is coming in thicker and looks and feels full of life and vigor." — W. C. Great Neck, L. I.

New Hair Growing

"Results are wonderful. My hair has stopped falling out and I can see lots of new hair coming in." — F. D. B., Washington, D. C.

New Hair on Bald Spots

"I have used Thermo-S Treatment for 8 weeks, and although the top of my head has been entirely bald for 6 years, the results up to the present are gratifying. In fact the entire bald spot is covered with a fine growth of hair." — W. C., Kenner, Ohio.

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The Boston is the only adjustable garter made without metal parts on the face of pad—hence we say the **Pad without a Pucker.** For quality, comfort and service insist on having Bostons.

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G. Washington's
Delicious-Instant Coffee

FIRST PRIZE \$500.00
ADELE EDWARDS, 23 Winant Avenue,
Port Richmond, S. I. N. Y.

FIRST PRIZE RECIPE

G. Washington's Coffee ½ cup of butter, 1 cup sugar, 2 eggs, 1½ cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ¼ teaspoon salt, ½ cup milk, 1 teaspoon G. Washington's Coffee. Cream butter, add sugar gradually, then eggs well beaten. Mix; sift and add flour, baking powder and salt, alternately with the milk in which the G. Washington's Coffee has been dissolved. Beat thoroughly and bake in moderately hot oven in two greased square layer cake pans.

G. Washington's Coffee Apple Filling 1 pound apples, pared and grated, 1 pound powdered sugar, rind and juice 3 lemons, ¼ pound sweet butter, 2 well beaten eggs, 1 tablespoon G. Washington's Coffee, 1 cup finely chopped pecans, (optional). Put apples, sugar, rind and juice of lemons with butter into upper vessel of double boiler, place over hot water over moderate fire, and when butter is melted add well beaten eggs and cook until thick—about 15 minutes—stirring frequently. When cooked add the G. Washington's Coffee, dissolved in 1 tablespoon hot water, and the pecans if used. When cold spread between layers of cake.

G. Washington's Coffee Frosting 1½ cups boiling water, grated rind brown sugar, ¼ cup butter, ½ cup cream, 1 egg yolk. Cook together all ingredients except egg yolk until a little thick in cold water forms soft ball. Cool slightly, add beaten egg yolk and beat until thick enough to spread.

2nd Prize \$250.00
Mrs. Huldah McKee
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3rd Prize \$75.00
Mrs. Henry B. Graybill
 Hong Lok
 Canton, China

4th Prize \$50.00
Nina de Sola Mendes
 Pelham
 New York

5th Prize \$25.00
Mara Serriov
 General Delivery
 Sarasota, Florida

The contest proved a revelation as to the many different ways in which G. Washington's Delicious-Instant Coffee can be used—and don't forget it makes delicious coffee.



We have prepared a folder of the prize winning recipes and names of all winners which will be sent upon request.

Sold in three sizes—small, medium and large
G. WASHINGTON COFFEE REFINING CO.
 522 Fifth Avenue New York



See How Easy It Is To Learn Music This New Way

YOU KNOW how easy it is to put letters together and form words, once you have learned the alphabet. Playing a musical instrument is not very much different. Once you learn the notes, playing melodies on the mandolin, piano or violin is simply a matter of putting the notes together correctly.

The first note shown above is F. Whether you are singing from notes, playing the piano or banjo or any other musical instrument, that note in the first space is always F. The four notes indicated are F, A, C, E, easy to remember because they spell the word "face." Certain strings on the mandolin, certain keys on the piano, represent these same notes—and once you learn them, playing melodies on the instrument is largely a matter of following the notes.

Anyone can now learn to play a musical instrument at home, without a teacher. A new simplified method of teaching reduces all music to its simplest possible form. You can now master singing, piano-playing, or any musical instrument you wish right at home, quickly, easily, without endless study and practice.

Practice is essential, of course—but it's fun the new way. You'll begin to play melodies almost from the start. The "print-and-picture" method of self-teaching is fascinating; it's simply a matter of following one interesting step after another. You learn that the note in the first space is F, and that a certain key on the piano is F. Thereafter you will always be able to read F and play it whenever you see it. Just as you are able to recognize the letters that make a word, you will be able to recognize and play the notes that make a melody. It's easy, interesting.

You don't have to know anything whatever about music to learn to play a musical instrument this new way. You don't have to pin yourself down to regular hours, to regular classes. You practice whenever you can, learn as quickly as you please. All the intricate "mysteries" of music have been reduced to a method of amazing simplicity—each step is made as

clear as ABC. Thousands have already learned to play their favorite musical instruments this splendid new quick way.

You Can Play Your Favorite Instrument Three Months From Today

If you are dissatisfied with your present work, let music act as the stepping-stone into a new career. If you long for a hobby, a means of self-expression, let music be the new interest in your life. If you wish to be a social favorite, if you wish to gain popularity—choose your favorite instrument, and, through the wonderful home-study method of the U. S. School of Music, play it three months from today.

You can do it. Youngsters of 10 to 12 years have done it, and men as old as 80 have found new interest and enjoyment in learning how to play a musical instrument. You don't have to listen while others entertain any longer. YOU can be the center of attraction, the talented person who holds the audience fascinated.

Is it the piano you wish to play, the mandolin, the violin, the saxophone? Do you want to learn how to sing from notes? Are you eager to be able to play "jazz" on the clarinet, the banjo?

Free Book Explains All—Send Today

Send for our free book called "Music Lessons in Your Own Home." Everyone who is interested in music should send at once for this valuable book. It not only explains the wonderful new simplified method of learning music, but tells about a special short-time offer now being made to music-lovers. With it will be sent an Illustrated Folder which proves, better than words, how delightfully quick and easy the famous Print-and-Picture Method is. Mail this coupon at once for your copy. But act now before the supply is exhausted. Instruments supplied when needed, cash or credit. U. S. School of Music, 3995 Brunswick Building, New York.

Please Write Your Name and Address Very Plainly, so that there will be no difficulty about the booklet and folder reaching you.

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FRECKLES

Now is the Time to Get Rid of These Ugly Spots

There's no longer the slightest need of feeling ashamed of your freckles, as Othine—double strength—is guaranteed to remove these homely spots. Simply get an ounce of Othine—double strength—from any drug or department store and apply a little of it night and morning and you should soon see that even the worst freckles have begun to disappear, while the lighter ones have vanished entirely. It is seldom that more than an ounce is needed to completely clear the skin and gain a beautiful complexion.

Be sure to ask for the double strength Othine as this is sold under guarantee of money back if it fails to remove your freckles.

We recommend Othine Complexion Soap for use with Othine, also as a shampoo—it's wonderful for washed hair—25c a cake at all drug or department stores or by mail. Othine Laboratories, Inc., Buffalo, N. Y.



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Big Winner. Just out. Complete line of waterproof aprons for men, women and children. Year-round demand. Show samples—housewives order on sight. Styles for every use. Best values in America. Direct from Akron, the rubber city. 100% Profit. Mrs. Martin, W. Va., made \$30.00 in one day. Jos. Brand, Ohio, made \$10.43 in one hour. You can do as well. FREE Outfit —to workers. New plan starts experience needed. Simply take orders. We deliver and collect. Commissions paid same day you take order. Send for exclusive territory and Free Outfit Offer. WRITE TODAY. KRISTIE MFG. CO., 625 Bar St., Akron, O.

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YOUR SKIN CAN BE QUICKLY CLEARED OF Pimples, Blackheads, Acne Eruptions on the face or body. Barbers itch, Eczema, Enlarged Pores, Oily or Shiny Skin. Write today for my FREE Booklet, "A CLEAR-TONE SKIN", telling how I cured myself after being afflicted for over fifteen years. \$1,000 Cash Cash! can clear your skin of the above blemishes. E. S. GIVENS, 113 Commercial Building, KANSAS CITY, MO.

Kills Catarrh Germ In Three Minutes

Chronic catarrh, no matter how bad, and cases of bronchial asthma now yield instantly to the amazing discovery of a French scientist. This drugless method called Lavex kills the germ in three minutes, yet is positively harmless to the most delicate tissues. Your head and lungs are cleared like magic. Sufferers are relieved in a single night.

To prove it and to introduce Lavex to a million sufferers in one month, I offer to send a treatment free and postpaid, to any one who will write for it. No obligation. No cost. If it cures you, you can repay the favor by telling your friends—if not, the loss is mine. No matter what you have tried, just send me your name and address for this generous free treatment and prove that you can be rid of catarrh.

W. R. SMITH, 2107 Lavex Bldg., Kansas City, Mo.

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CASH or CREDIT

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Blue White, perfect-cut Diamond. The ring is set 14-k White Gold. Price \$100. Terms \$10 down, then \$2.50 A Week

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Blue White perfect-cut Diamond. The ring is set 14-k White Gold. \$77.50. P.P. \$7.75 down, then \$1.00 A Week

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All Platinum, \$25 up. With Diamonds: Three Diamonds, \$65; five Diamonds, \$80; seven Diamonds, \$95; nine Diamonds, \$110; surrounded by Diamonds, \$225; solid White or Green Gold, \$35.00 up.

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HAMILTON No. 992, 21 Jewels, Adjusted to 5 positions. Gold \$55
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40 hours time winning. Gold filled 20-year Case

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AGENTS NEW SPARK PLUG Visible Flash



Just Out—Amazing Invention—Beacon Lite Spark Plugs. You see the flash of each explosion in the cylinders. Tells which are firing right. Greatest improvement in spark plugs since gas engines were invented. Wonderful gas savers. Agents coming every day.

\$90 A WEEK
Easy to make with new sure-fire plan. Sells on sight to every auto owner. Phillips, Ont. writes "Sold 2 dozen today, 3 dozen yesterday. Rush 10 dozen." Write for special Free Demonstrator Offer and FREE deal to introduce these wonder spark plugs in your territory. Write quick—today.

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The Rider of the Mohave

12 mo. 318 pages.

By JAMES FELLOW

Price, \$2.00

Once to every man is given the opportunity to shape his rough-hewn life and to make it a thing of utility and worth. This much is famed in song and story, but not so much has been written about the opportunities of the man who has made life a failure, to reform and be somebody really worth while.

Billy Gee, in this splendid Western story, becomes somebody worth while, but not until he has made the reader hold his breath time and time again.

The lives of the people in the great American desert are depicted with a clarity that is really startling—so startling, in fact, that after reading this story, Zane Grey, who is an authority on Western stories, if any one in this country can claim to be, sent Mr. Fellow a personal letter of congratulation: "I think you have written a darn good book, and I congratulate you. There are so many Western books and so few have ideals. I hope yours has the good sale it deserves."

CHELSEA HOUSE
70-89 Seventh Ave. New York City

New writer wins \$1000 prize

THE \$1000 prize offered by the Mission Film Corporation for the best screen story based on the title, "The Sunshine of Paradise Alley," has just been awarded to Otto E. A. Schmidt, of San Francisco.

Mr. Schmidt's story was chosen because of its high rating in dramatic strength, entertainment value and picturable action—a tribute to the character of the training he received from the Palmer Institute of Authorship.

Scores of other students of the Palmer Institute are also selling short stories, novels, plays, special articles and photoplays.

The list includes Anita Pettibone, whose novel, "The Bitter Country," was recently published by Doubleday, Page & Co.; Phyllis Cumberland, who sold "Tangled Lives" to Thomas H. Ince; Miss Bernadine King, who wrote "What Did the Bishop Say?"; John M. Byers, who sold his first play to a New York Producer; Charles Shepherd, who wrote "The Ways of Ah Sin"; Tadema Bussiere, whose play, "The Open Gate," was given its premiere at the Morosco Theatre, Los Angeles, in October, 1924; Jane Hurtle, who wrote "Robes of Redemption"; Paul Schofield, who produced "Through the Dark," and Miss Winifred Kimball, who won the \$10,000 prize in the scenario contest conducted by the *Chicago Daily News*.

Write for This Book and Free Creative Test

The Palmer Institute is unique among educational institutions because it seeks for training only those with natural creative ability who can profit by its instruction. Therefore, no one is invited to enroll for its home-study courses until he or she has passed the Palmer Creative Test.

This test is the most novel means ever devised for enabling you to obtain an accurate analysis of your writing ability. The filling out of this Creative Test and our analysis and subsequent training have enabled scores of Palmer students to sell stories and photoplays. Our Board of Examiners grades your reply without cost or obligation.

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Quick Cooking

is only one of the advantages of

The New Pettijohn's

WHOLE WHEAT CEREAL

THREE to five minutes after the water comes to a boil, your New Pettijohn's is ready for the table—cooked *through and through*, hot, delicious and *fresh*.

Eaten with good top-milk or whole cream, the flavor is something to be grateful for—the wholesome, natural flavor of selected Whole Wheat.

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The New Pettijohn's is just the selected Whole Wheat. So it con-

tains 25 per cent Natural Wheat Bran—and the valuable Mineral Salts and Vitamines of the wheat as well.

It is pre-cooked, processed to develop the flavor, rolled and delicately toasted.

It makes a generous, grateful breakfast—oftentimes a welcome change for luncheon—and a nourishing hot supper for growing children.

TRY IT—TASTE IT
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1. Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes.
2. The pick of America's Wheat—contains 25% Natural Bran, with essential Vitamines and Mineral Salts
3. A new and delicious Flavor brought out by pre-cooking.



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Bring Out The Beauty of Your Teeth With Colgate's

If you wish to be pretty, take care of your teeth. If you wish to be healthy, take care of your teeth.

Attractive teeth are as necessary to good looks as lovely eyes and velvet skin. And to good health they are even more necessary. Don't let tooth decay get started. Prevent it.

Colgate's is a preventive dentifrice—safe, effective, and pleasant to use because of its delightful taste. It removes causes of tooth decay by the gentle "washing" action of its non-gritty chalk and tasteless soap, the two ingredients that authorities say are most important in a dentifrice.

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